THE BLOWTORCH’S BIG BOOK OF BASKETBALL FACTS

TREY KERBY
For Laura
GILBERT ARENAS

From the posters covering every inch of his room, to his love of “The Magic Hour, to his collection of his favorite player’s game-worn socks there was no doubt that the child was a Magic devotee. This wasn't uncommon for Angelenos. Growing up in Los Angeles during the 1980s basically guaranteed at least some devotion to a Los Angeles Laker, and most times, it was Magic. And just like so many from that place and time, Gilbert Arenas was convinced it was he who would inherit the Los Angeles point guard mantle. Unlike most, he was kind of right.

The Gilbert Arenas we know today owes a lot to one of basketball’s greatest entertainers. There is no doubt that Magic’s control of both his team and his connection to his fans are qualities that Arenas has in spades. And clubs, diamonds, and hearts. He’s got a lot of those qualities, just like his hero. A whole deck full, which is a lot.

But with the good comes the bad. Gilbert was devastated by Magic’s stillborn movie theatre venture and vowed to avenge his hero’s biggest failure that didn’t involve an autoimmune disease. After all, someone needed to clear Magic’s name, and fellow Angeleno Jelani McCoy sure wasn’t the man for the job.

Arenas knew the problem. His father had been an actor, so he knew the industry. And of course, he always knew what people wanted. Put those together and your chances at business success are pretty good.

His plan was pretty straightforward. During the summer of 2006, after his huge contract extension had kicked in, Arenas would by stock in the theater chain, and make one simple change. He was going to serve candied yams at the concessions stand.

Because the theaters had done so poorly, and Magic was an Arenas fan, the stock purchase couldn't have been easier. The yams, on the other hand, were a problem. Apparently, keeping several thousand yams a night piping hot isn’t something most theaters are set up for. But Arenas couldn’t let his hero down.

No, he did what any young millionaire would do: he spent his money. Investing nearly six million dollars in to installing space-age yam heaters in each theater, Arenas assured that the theater would be able to serve an oven-fresh yam to anyone at any time. Unfortunately for Arenas and Johnson, it turns out that the movie-going public wasn't looking for fresh yams, and there’s no such thing as a space-age yams heater, because astronauts don’t eat yams in space. All they wanted was to watch something different than Magic’s appearance in Michael Jackson’s “Remember the Time” video. Live and learn.
MIKE BIBBY

*Tweedley deedley deet.*

*Tweedley dee dee*

*Tweedley deedley deet*

With those nine pseudo-words, Mike Bibby became the lead soprano of the Shadow Mountain High School Singing Songbirds, America’s 14th most famous amateur glee club.

It had been a hard three years for Bibby. Though he would soon be named an All-American for his basketball exploits and was dating the third-hottest girl in school, he felt extremely unfulfilled.

The dream began as a seventh-grade student. After hearing Boyz II Men’s hit single “Motownphilly”, Bibby knew he wanted to sing. Infatuated with the paneled shirts, tapered jeans, berets and smooth harmonies of the quartet, Bibby was convinced his ticket to fame was through his voice, even though his father is former New York Knick Henry Bibby.

Soon, Bibby was devouring any and all music he could get his hands on. Vocalists ranging from Louis Armstrong to Placido Domingo to Tiny Tim fascinated the bespectacled youth. Imitating each and every one of their styles simultaneously, Bibby soon developed a singing voice all his own. The results were not pretty.

As one can imagine, the combination was not widely accepted in a metropolitan high school. Seeking to make a name for himself as a singer, Bibby entered his school’s talent contest as a freshman. Students turned out in droves to see the local basketball star try his hand behind the mic. Singing a banjo-driven New Jack song of his own composing (“Newer Jack Swing”), Bibby was mercilessly booed by his peers.

Bibby’s confidence was shaken, causing him to introvert, leading to a stretch during his sophomore basketball season where he did nothing but throw left-handed passes. Though still singing in the private studio his parents had built, Bibby vowed to never sing in public again.

As a reward for finishing his junior year as the number two player named Michael in Arizona, Bibby convinced his father to hire him a voice coach. Training specifically with the song “Rockin’ Robin,” Bibby and his coach soon were able to cobble together a reasonable simulation of the Jackson 5 version. Using this as an audition piece, Bibby was deemed top soprano by the Songbirds’ leader. But Bibby could only truly sing “Rockin’ Robin,” and all other songs featured his sickening hybrid. After performances, Bibby was forced to write a letter of apology to each patron. He was removed from the squad and has received instructions from the Arizona government never to sing again.
Imagine growing up with the name Chauncey. Unless you live in the 16th century, things are going to be tough. It takes a lot to push aside the stigma that comes with having such a nimbly pimbly name in today’s day and age. Just ask Chauncey Billups.

It’s not common knowledge that “Chauncey” is an Olde English term for “office holder.” But Chauncey Billups never had an office. All he had was a burning desire to someday travel to outer space, and an equally large, if not greater, affinity for the acting of Will Smith. It was only through basketball that Billups would be able to live out his most wild fantasies regarding these two seemingly divergent passions.

It was in September 2005 that Chauncey Billups received seasons 1-4 of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* on Digital Video Disc from his friend Tony Delk. Billups had endlessly quoted many classic episodes of the Emmy-nominated series during the Pistons’ road trips. Unbeknownst to Delk, Billups wasn’t just a fan of *Bel-Air*; he was also the president and co-founder (along with Mehmet Okur — see page 103) of the International Federation of Will Smith Fanatics. A simple Internet search would have revealed this information to Delk, but his avowed distrust for technology set in motion events that no one could have foreseen. For it was not until after he had received the DVDs that Billups would hatch his plan for interplanetary travel.

After the 2005-06, season Billups dedicated himself to studying the intricacies of *Bel-Air*. It was during his 16th viewing of the classic “Will Meets Tyra” episode that Billups devised his crackpot plan to leave Earth. Awed by Smith’s street smarts and can-do attitude, Billups realized that as a millionaire, he now had the means to live out his childhood dream of intergalactic exploration.

As he researched the requirements for private space travel, Billups was soon confronted with the fact that though he was extraordinarily rich by any normal man’s measure, he was unfortunately not yet Lance Bass rich. As the 2006-07 season progressed, Billups made sure that he maintained his high level of play, not just for his basketball benefit, but also to retain his high physical fitness level, one of the most stringent determinants of candidacy for space travel. An added benefit was that his strong contributions and considerable hardiness would allow Billups to sign a rich contract in the summer before the 2007-08 season.

Billups sought a companion for his dream of orbiting Earth. Knowing it was an expensive proposition, Billups was forced to shelve his plan until November 2008, when he was traded to the Denver Nuggets and encountered another absurdly wealthy gentleman with a penchant for interplanetary travel (see Carmelo Anthony, page 44). A man of few words, Billups became the silent partner behind Carmelo Anthony’s *Space Adventure Letters*, outer space’s first tourism book. The book hit The New York Times’ paperback nonfiction best-seller list immediately, where it stayed atop the list for 18 weeks.
JOSE CALDERON

Jose Calderon is the youngest of 14 sons. By birth order the Calderon goes Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose, Jose and Jose. Some speculate that Jose is a family name and they are probably right, though it is possible that Calderon’s parents simply enjoyed their status as owner of Spain’s most successful Xerox retailer.

Calderon was born in Villanueva de la Serena to his copy crazy parents who had ignored Spanish lore that 14 children was way too many (this myth has been passed to many nations). But in Spain, it is more than just lore. It is law.

Spanish tradition dictates that any child born after the 13th in a family shall be deemed a ward of the state, and out of respect to the Spanish Foreign Legion, Calderon’s mother did just that, taking Jose (the last one) to an orphanage after he’d been born. It was a tough choice, but she had seen some storyboards for Pan’s Labyrinth in one of her copier stores and did not want to risk anything.

Forced to fend for himself in various orphanages, Calderon soon befriended fellow Spaniard Pau Gasol and his brother Marc on a neighborhood basketball court. This friendship proved fruitful as Calderon was able to glean a great deal of basketball knowledge from the Gasols and their family, while carefully ignoring their lax grooming practices. But still he wondered why there were so many men in his town who shared his name.

Like any junior detective, Calderon soon acted upon his curiosity and headed to his local consulate. There he found a surprising amount of records for “Jose Calderon,” when he expected to just find his. As Calderon carefully examined the nearly-identical documents, he noticed one tiny inconsistency. On the birthdate line, a tiny hash mark had been made next to the date. Continuing through the records he soon determined that his record was the fourteenth and that he could easily find his birth parents and all of his brothers.

As he turned he noticed a small gang of people that had stealthily cornered him in the records room. Every single one of the people had Calderon’s extra thick eyebrows and quickly embraced their lost son for a giant family hug. They had been waiting for him to check on his birth records for nearly 16 years and were glad that he’d finally triggered their sophisticated alarm. Unfortunately, the 11th Jose was crushed under the weight of the group embrace, which allowed NBA Jose to move back in with his family.
Back in the olden days of the 1980s, clothing manufacturing standards aren’t what they are today. Spandex was abundant. People wore jackets made exclusively from asbestos. And, of course, Michael Jackson had his infamous nuclear vest, made entirely from discarded plutonium. Clothing choices were dangerous, from both a safety and aesthetic viewpoint. As these things are wont to do, these lowered standards trickled down to peasant Americans. It was a bastardized version of Ronald Reagan’s trickle-down theory in action.

Most notably was the Footie Scandal of 1983. Because of the high demand for their product, footie pajama manufacturers were cranking out goods at an unprecedented rate. After winning the presidential election on a campaign of “footies on every child,” the United States footie pajama conglomerates felt the pressure. More than a million sets of the pajamas were produced daily. Naturally, the quality suffered. Nowhere was this more prominent than in Seattle, Washington.

With daily precipitation averaging nearly 37 inches a day, and climates that never go above 50 degrees at their hottest, the toasty nighttime outfits are a natural fit for Seattle. As such, this was ground zero for Reagan’s footie expansion program, which promised at least one pajama factory for every 15 square miles in the most needy locales. Economists now say that it was the perfect storm for the Footie Scandal of ’83, something that continues to affect Jamal Crawford to this day.

Though he is only one of millions, Jamal Crawford is the most notable survivor of Short Leg Syndrome, the affliction that crippled the entire footie industry. With numerous competitors producing an absurd number of pajamas per day, it was inevitable that a bad batch would see daylight. As many feared, lot number K61080385463 consisted of more than 1.6 million footies that had a left leg that was a full three inches shorter than the right. Ideally, these would have been recalled, but the people of Seattle insisted on their children wearing the footies.

As you can probably deduce, the shorter left leg of the pajamas resulted in horribly disfigured children, including Jamal Crawford. Because his leg was jammed in to the tiny footie, his left leg did not grow as quickly as his right, resulting in a six inch discrepancy that still plagues Crawford to this day.

Fortunately, Jamal Crawford is the rare human that can overcome Short Leg Syndrome, but he is not without ailment. Once you see it, you will not un-see it. Each and every trip to the basket, Crawford must aim 45 degrees right of where he wants to end up. His warped leg path naturally guides him back to his target. Others are not so lucky.
BARON DAVIS

A butter-testing program. That was his idea. He had no idea what it meant, but he knew that was his idea. It had come to him in the middle of the night, while he was trying to fall asleep, so that’s how he knew it was a good idea. After all, he had his best ideas in that time between sleep and dreams. He was sure this was big.

Baron Davis sat up straight, yawned, and then rolled over on to several small piles of one hundred dollar bills. “What is a butter testing program?” he thought to himself. There was really only one way to find out, and that was to start one.

He began on the Internet, registering ButterTesting.com and putting up a stand-alone website asking for volunteers. Davis made sure to keep his name off the site, not wanting to draw attention to it until he was sure of what he was doing. To his surprise, thousands of people signed up in the first night. It seemed that he’d struck gold. Or rather, yellowish.

Now he had to figure out what exactly butter testing constituted. Sure, he could just have all of his volunteers over to a huge warehouse and give them different sticks of butter to eat, but that seemed to simple. No, if he was going to do this, he was going to do it big.

Davis got his agent on the phone, telling him the whole story. Understandably, his agent was confused, considering no one had ever heard of a butter-testing program. After all, you either want to eat butter or you don’t. There’s not really a reason for a test. But since Baron was paying him several thousand dollars a month just to answer questions like this, he did what he could. By the end of the next day, every major butter brand had signed up for the program.

Representatives from Land O’ Lakes, Country Crock, Parkay, and several others showed up to the Clippers’ practice facility at the predetermined time, each armed with one thousand sticks of their standard butter. Then, the volunteers showed up with their knives. Each ate one pat of butter a minute until they could eat no more. After seventeen days of butter eating (not including sleep time of four hours a night), Baron Davis collected the data from each of the volunteers with regards to each brand. He then paid a friend $5000 to enter this data in to a new computer where it still resides. Baron Davis still hasn’t figured out what a butter-testing program is, but if he ever does, he has the data.
JORDAN FARMAR

Jordan Farmar is the only part-Jewish and part-black player in NBA history, much like Lisa Bonet is the only part-Jewish and part-black member of The Cosby Show even though all of the siblings supposedly share the same parents. But that’s not the only similarity that he shares with Lisa Bonet. Actually, the parallels are a little creepy.

Like Bonet, Farmar had a bit part in the romantic comedy High Fidelity where he was one of the kids outside of the record store who made John Cusack realize how much he still loved music. He was a skateboarder back then, and was typecast as such. In fact, Bonet was instrumental in helping Farmar get his first taste of big screen success.

Furthermore, like Bonet, Farmar was at one time married to pseudo-rock star Lenny Kravitz (another fellow part-black and part-Jewish person). While this was not ever legal or even real, Jordan Farmar was definitely a big-time Lenny Kravitz fan back in the “Are You Gonna Go My Way?” days. He loved the song so much that he has its entire lyrics tattooed across his shoulders and back despite the fact that most of the words are Lenny Kravitz if you are going to go his way over and over.

But that’s where the similarities end, and there’s more than a little animosity betwixt the three most famous part-Jewish part-black celebrities of the modern era.

Unlike Bonet and Kravitz, Farmar has never sported dreadlocks as he feels that would look really silly, though he often insists upon a goatee that is just as ill-conceived. Because his hair does not cover them, Farmer chooses to show off his gigantic ears while Bonet and Kravitz often keep theirs hidden out of a deep sense of shame.

Also unlike Kravitz and Bonet, Farmar hates Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me, for which Kravitz wrote a song and which Bonet considers to be the finest piece of American cinema. It is this disagreement that causes the most fights between the three when they get together to talk about their similarities. Since he feels so strongly about the second film of the Austin Powers trilogy, Farmar has refused to come out with his approval of both Bonet and Kravitz. In turn, they never ask him which way he is gonna go.
RAYMOND FELTON

People have made houses out of a lot crazier things than a box of crayons. There was the guy in Norway who fashioned a house out of tumbleweeds (quite abundant in their wintry climate). Abraham Lincoln’s house, ironically, was made from the children’s toy Lincoln Logs. Everyone knows about the old lady who lived in a shoe, as she would later become the basis for a nursery rhyme. And of course, Michael Jordan had his home made from a collection of gold, silver, and silverish gold. Basic building theory, really. So when Raymond Felton decided he wanted to live in a box of crayons, people were surprised, but not so surprised.

These sort-of surprised people said, “Raymond Felton, you can’t live in a box of crayons because you are a full-grown human,” or, “why would you want to live in a box of crayons?” Every visionary encounters naysayers, and these sayers were certainly saying nay. But Raymond Felton, he wasn’t phased.

No, Raymond Felton was the opposite (unphased). He knew that somehow, someway, he’d be living in a crayon box house soon enough. If that meant he had to find a way to shrink himself, he would. If that meant tearing open literally millions of Crayola boxes, then shellacking them together to make a crayon box shanty house, he would. Even if he had to move to New Hampshire, he would do it. Raymond Felton was living in a crayon box, haters or not.

It was in the planning stage of Operation Crayon House that Raymond Felton realized something very important to anyone who in undertaking a crazy obstacle: he was rich. Filthy rich. Luke Wilson rich. Four years of an NBA paycheck coupled with four years of being given shoes, clothes, and everything else he could possibly want leads to a sizable bankroll. That would help, obviously. So would his agent, Rick Magenta, heir to the color magenta fortune.

Telling Mr. Magenta his master plan, Felton knew he was close. After all, since Crayola had bought the rights to the magenta color presentation shortly after the Battle of Magenta in 1859, his agent had some pull at the crayon conglomerate. And pull he did. Just a week after his client requested the most ridiculous request any of his clients had ever requested, his was request was honored. On Felton’s North Carolina acre stood a replica Crayola box, supersized. Nearly four stories in height, and able to house 15 adults, the Crayola House has become a tourist attraction in the Charlotte area. And Raymond Felton couldn’t be happier. After all, he sleeps by the jungle green.
RANDY FOYE

He had been running for nearly 16 hours without stopping, but that was not going to stop Randy Foye. Not a chance. In fact, stopping running after he had not stopped running would run contradictory towards everything he had run for. It was a gift, this ability to run hour after hour, minute after minute, time unit after time unit as hard as when he started. Randy Foye hadn’t the slightest clue why he had been gifted this gift, but he knew it was just that: a gift.

It was three days after his third birthday that Randy Foye learned of this horrible malady. Yes, it would seem that an inexhaustible supply of energy would allow one certain advantages, but Randy Foye’s “power” was more complicated than that. Indeed he could run for hours on end, but he also couldn’t stop. And no matter how hard he tried, he had yet to develop the ability to change speeds. Lastly, he was three, an age that children are barely able to purchase goods from the local convenience store.

But all that didn’t matter to young Randy Foye, seeing as he was too young to fully comprehend the gravity of his decisions. His youth was both a blessing and a curse, while being mostly a curse. You see, even the smartest three year old is still pretty stupid in the grand scheme of things. No offense to noted childhood geniuses Haley Joel Osmond, Bobby Fischer, or Doogie Howser, but a three year old’s tiny, stupid brain barely holds enough nerve endings to actually reason through the complicated scenarios created by full-out sprinting for days at a time. As for the blessing part: that was a lie. Nothing good came from this.

Sure, Randy eventually taught himself how to change speeds and a rudimentary stopping mechanism (running in closer and closer concentric circles until the dizziness caused him to fall), but he also suffered a lifetime’s worth of broken bones by the age of six. When, at 14, he finally confronted the warlock that his mother Regina had convinced to grant him this “power,” he turned his anger towards him. Mentally setting his run speed near its maximum, Foye aimed himself at a brick wall just behind the warlock.

The initial blast of speed was enough to render the warlock unconscious, leaving him as padding for Foye’s constant pummeling of the wall. Over and over Foye smashed the warlock’s body in to the bricks until he suddenly stopped. Finally opening his eyes after five hours of wall smashing, Foye noticed the warlock had been vanished. With it Foye’s “power” disappeared, leaving him with only an almost unrivalled aerobic capacity and a set of sore shoulders.
DEVIN HARRIS

[Chapter redacted due to legal issues involving mustache-thickness disputes. Please continue in the next chapter as we resolve this conflict.]
JARRETT JACK

Jarrett Jack was born in Fort Washington, Maryland. Unlike most native Marylanders, Jack would not enjoy success in either the football or crab cake sectors, instead focusing his energies on basketball and pierogies. While he was initially an outcast for his devotion to these two foreign entities, Jack soon became recognized as Maryland’s most famous pierogi ambassador.

His mother, who insisted on giving her son two first names and no last name, in part developed this contrarian nature. Like all good mothers, Jarrett Jack’s mom told him he could do anything he put his mind to. Sure, she didn’t think a born and bred Marylander would ever forsake football and crab cakes, but she did encourage his passions, chief among them being pierogis.

Whether they be cheese, chocolate or cherry filled, Jarrett Jack has eaten only pierogis since he first learned how to make them at age 6. Since then, it’s been a consistent diet of breakfast pierogis in the morning, lunch pierogis in the afternoon and a single enormous dinner pierogi in the evening. Naturally, Jack would follow his supper with several different dessert pierogis until he would pass in to what he called a “pierogma,” which probably means pierogi coma.

Though shunned by neighborhood children for his refusal to bake the local delicacy, Jack soon cultivated a reputation as the East Coast’s preeminent pierogi chef. With a nod to his home state, Jack soon found a way to incorporate crab cakes in to his pierogis, making him a local legend. People from as far away as Washington (the state) would visit the Jack’s house for some of Jarrett’s famous pierogis. Soon he was considered the coolest guy in Fort Washington for his dedication to serving something besides deep-fried crab.

It was this reputation that gained Jack a scholarship to Georgia Tech University, where he would join the basketball team as a way to pass time during the pierogi slow season (November-March). While he’s had a fairly successful basketball career, those closest to him know that Jarrett Jack’s true passion lies in tiny, filled pastries. Someday, he’ll chase that dream like he did when he was a kid.
JASON KIDD

Children have some funny hobbies. Oftentimes, they collect things. Baseball cards, stamps, state quarters and rashes are popular collectibles among kids of all ages. Some children also fall into habits that greatly affect their adult lives. For instance, it’s not uncommon for a child to refuse to eat green vegetables, only to grow up and suffer from colon cancer or worse, scurvy. Basically any actions we take at a young age could someday come back to haunt or help us. No pressure. One such child who made some good decisions is Jason Kidd.

Nowadays, Jason Kidd is considered the greatest point guard to ever have been named Jason, as well as one of the top five point guards of any name. He is lauded for his ability to find open players, rebounding and defense. But the most widely acclaimed part of Jason Kidd’s game is his decision-making. And as stated before, those decision-making skills were honed at a young age. While most kids were busy getting rashes or nerdily trying to find the newest quarter, this Kidd was making flow charts.

As any cubicle worker can tell you, the flow chart is an easily interpreted plot of situations that ensure the correct choice is made, or that the next step in a series of sequential events is taken. Flow charts can be used to simply show the steps in a process or who to call when the morning shift lifeguard doesn’t show up. But Jason Kidd’s childhood flow charts were far more in-depth, intricate and useful.

From the age of 4 through today, Jason has constructed an endless array of notebook-sized flow charts in an endless array of notebooks. At night, Kidd would chart each and every choice that he had made that day. Eventually, he became so proficient that he could make seven charts a night. As he grew, the choices became more and more complicated, but by using his charts, Jason could be confident in the decisions he was making. After all, he knew the consequences before he made the choice.

Only after being introduced to his middle school’s film society did Jason Kidd realize how useful this obsession with charting his life could be. Ironically, since he hadn’t yet experienced this particular situation, he could not chart its results. Otherwise, scholars believe that he would have replaced Jerry West as the NBA’s logo. Nonetheless, Kidd soon realized that by combining his three loves (chart-making, film and basketball), he could, in essence, dictate the game before it happened.

To this day, Jason Kidd travels with a suitcase containing hundreds of notebooks, which contain thousands of pieces of paper that have more thousands of flow charts on them. Incomprehensible to the untrained eye, these charts are the secret to Jason Kidd’s unparalleled point-guarding.
ANDRE MILLER

Born a human being in Los Angeles, California, Miller was raised by his mother and father, who each held jobs. When he was born, his parents gave him the name Andre Lloyd because they liked that combination of names when in conjunction with the surname Miller. Andre was just like any baby, slightly pudgy and unable to speak.

However, Andre would soon learn to speak. In fact, Andre uttered his first word (“word”) at 26 months, typical for most children. By that time, Andre had already learned to eat things, such as food. He was, by most accounts, no longer a baby and was now considered a child.

As he grew older, he also grew larger. Though he started at just 7 pounds and 8 ounces, Miller would gain significant amounts of weight, while at the same time growing taller than his baby height of 20 inches. It wasn’t until he was 5 years old that he began kindergarten. This perfectly normal starting age set Andre on a path to normalcy.

However, it soon became apparent that Andre would graduate from kindergarten. When this happened, his parents (who continued to hold jobs) made the controversial decision to move him straight from kindergarten to first grade. Just like any other child, Andre learned how to read and write. It was during school that he learned these skills. His teachers have described Andre as “that kid who was just like all the other kids.”

What they didn’t know is that Andre would go on to attend high school after completing eighth grade. Miller attended high school at a local high school that serviced grades nine through 12. While in high school, Miller took such subjects as math, English, physical education and science. He enjoyed school, because he could learn many things there, due to the teaching.

At this same time, Miller had continued to grow, just as expected. When he reached a certain point (6 feet, 2 inches), doctors told him that he was done growing. They were right, as Miller currently stands at that height.

Miller’s high school years were filled with such activities as attending school, being a human and, of course, breathing. Miller soon realized that by playing basketball he could breathe at a faster rate than normal, so Miller joined the school’s team. In between breathing and school work, Andre excelled on the court. After graduation he attended the University of Utah, where he continued to breathe, do school work and play basketball. To this day, Miller still breathes and plays basketball.
STEVE NASH

There are a number of “good guys” in the National Basketball Association. Jermaine O’Neal (see page 99) is widely renowned for his work as director of the League of Underwater Nations. Emeka Okafor (see page 102) has earned praise for spearheading the General Good Fund. But among these titans of charity, none is held in higher regard than Phoenix Suns point guard Steve Nash.

In 2001, Nash founded the Steve Nash Foundation. This cleverly named organization seeks to encourage health in youth in and around the areas of Phoenix, Arizona and British Columbia, Canada. After being granted charitable status in 2004, the amazingly dubbed Steve Nash Foundation won the equally wittily christened Steve Patterson Award for Excellence in Sports Philanthropy in 2008. And while at first glance this may seem like a clear case of one Steve looking out for another, the truth is that in 2007, the excellently titled Steve Nash Foundation introduced its most daring program: Donating Hot Dogs.

Donating Hot Dogs is just as simple as it sounds, but the results were, and continue to be, revolutionary. The basic premise of the initiative is that residents of the serviced areas bring any and all hot dogs that they encounter to numerous collection bins around the city. Soon thereafter, the hot dogs are destroyed via chemical processes.

Because the weather patterns of Phoenix and British Columbia provide ample opportunities for cookouts, barbecues and backyard get-togethers, the children in these areas consume greater quantities of hot dog per capita than any other regions on Earth. Since the caloric, sodium and fat contents of the average hot dog are so high, these innocent children find their health endangered simply because they enjoy such great weather. It is only through the Steve Nash Foundation that these children are saved from the dangers of overeating.

In 2007 alone, Donating Hot Dogs collected nearly 2.5 million hot dogs. Additionally, another 500,000 bratwursts, sausages and other encased meats were donated as the communities banded together to fight childhood obesity. The resulting impact was amazing. In just six months, the average child in these areas saw their daily hot dog intake drop from slightly above four to just under one. This seemingly minor change in eating habits caused obesity rates plummet dramatically.

While no one could have imagined that Donating Hot Dogs would be such a roaring success, the eloquently titled Steve Nash Foundation proved that even the most minor of changes can make a huge difference. Clearly, the Steve Patterson Award for Excellence in Sports Philanthropy was well-deserved, and not just another instance of the shadowy international conclave of Steves seeking to further each other’s causes at each and every turn.
JAMEER NELSON

Like any warm-blooded American male, Jameer Nelson likes to make the home improvements around his multimillion-dollar house. While it’s true that he could easily hire a contractor to fix something as simple as a loose toilet seat cover and not even notice the money being spent, he prefers to get his hands dirty and do it himself. With no training at all, Jameer has installed light fixtures, replaced water heater elements and built unfathomable amounts of Swedish-made furniture, among many other simple tasks.

Though Jameer has the curiosity and desire to be his own handyman, he readily admits that he can’t do everything. When his mom’s microwave broke, Jameer couldn’t do anything except tell her to reheat her leftovers in the oven, where they taste better anyways. He still can’t figure out why there are so many light switches in his kitchen, even though he’s lived in his house for quite some time. And, of course, shelves are the bane of his existence.

It might seem that a shelf, just a single flat piece of wood, would be among the easier home improvement projects that one could undertake. You just line up the holes, screw in some screws, and that’s that. But as Jameer Nelson will ruefully tell you, it’s a lot harder than you think. Take, for instance, Jameer Nelson’s photo shelf.

Like many wives, Jameer Nelson’s wife, Imani, wanted to decorate their house. Walking through the furniture store, she fell in love with a simple three-inch wide ledge used to display pictures of all sizes. Wanting to fill the space above their bed, Imani purchased not only the six-foot long shelf, but also its four-foot long version as an extension of sorts. Upon her return home, Jameer immediately recognized the pain he was about to endure.

Since the shelf was just a ridged piece of wood, it wouldn’t be easy. Because of the spacing on the shelf, he couldn’t screw into studs like he wanted to. When he tried, somehow the stainless steel screw he was using broke in half. Then, when he settled on drywall anchors for the rest of the shelf, the anchor broke through the drywall, falling inside of his bedroom walls.

Incensed at what had just happened, Jameer immediately declared the shelf the worst decoration ever bought by anyone ever (a slight overreaction). He then spent the next 45 minutes watching online tutorials on patching drywall. And though he has vowed to never again hang a shelf, he is happy to have added spackling to his already considerable tool belt. After all, that tool belt is why his teammates call him “Shingles.”
TONY PARKER

We all know Tony Parker as the pseudo-bearded, effete, floater-shooting point guard for the San Antonio Spurs. We know that he is now married to Eva Longoria, supposed actress of television shows that were popular four years ago. It’s common knowledge that he came to the Spurs from France (the country) and that his brother smells like garbage. Everyone knows this. Your sister knows this and she didn’t even really like Desperate Housewives that much when people actually watched that show. And though it seems like we’ve watched Tony grow up before our eyes, there were 19 years we didn’t know anything about him, and those 19 years are key to Tony Parker being who he is.

In particular, one year is key to Tony Parker’s development. In 1996, at the age of 14, Parker spent a year in Russia, home to many traditions that we could never understand. These traditions, and that year, were so instrumental that Parker often tells people that he’s Russian, even though no one believes him because they hear him talk and come on he’s so French. Nonetheless, the year in Russia was big time.

As he had yet to enjoy his growth spurt, Parker was willing to do anything to increase his skill level in order to compete at the highest level. He agreed to the controversial injection regiment pioneered by Ivan Drago prior to his fight with Rocky Balboa (as shown in the documentary *Rocky IV*). This did nothing. He undertook an intense stretching program that would leave him pulled from head to toe for 96 hours at a time, hoping to grow taller. It didn’t work. Parker followed the Russian training program requiring that any walking he wanted to do would be replaced by cartwheels. His wrists got strong, but that’s about it. Tony Parker was at the end of his rope. He’d end up like his brother, a pretty good player who smells like garbage, but isn’t NBA level.

But then he heard of a rarely used Russian elixir that would deliver its drinkers wishes in exactly five years. It’s called eagle head soup, and it’s exactly how it sounds. Basically, a Russian shaman pours boiling water over a severed eagle head for 96 hours (Russia has 96 hour days) while humming the Tetris theme song, then the drinker eats the soup, head and all, while they think intensely about what it is they want.

While some say eagle head soup is a cruel and ineffective myth, Tony Parker was drafted by the Spurs on June 27, 2001, five years to the day that he ate his one and only bowl of the concoction. Think about it.
CHRIS PAUL

It was a dark and stormy night the first time that Chris Paul was approached by agents from Variegated Advanced Scientific Technologies (V.A.S.T.). And while that sentence may sound like a cliché, the accompanying story is anything but. It is a story of underhandedness, secrecy and the pureness of heart necessary to reject this world’s evils. Like many stories do, it starts with a dog.

On June 16, 2005, Chris Paul’s dog, Sweet Potato, was doing a bunch of typical annoying dog things. For instance, earlier that night, Paul had taken Sweet Potato out to her usual bathroom spot, but Sweet Potato refused to do her business. Then, when they came in, Sweet Potato got every single one of her toys out, but quickly lost interest, leaving Chris’ living room looking like a bootleg PetSmart with carpet. As Chris became more and more frustrated with his dog, Sweet Potato tried to send him over the edge. Standing at the door and barking, Chris knew that Sweet Potato was finally ready to go pee. Good citizen and lover of all creatures great or small that he is, Paul took his canine outside. As soon as they hit the sidewalk, Sweet Potato darted right, a direction she almost never took. Her bloodhound instincts kicking in, Sweet Potato weaved a zigzagging path around Chris Paul’s neighborhood. Since he had done nothing but watch *The Deadliest Catch* that evening, Chris didn’t mind the excursion. But as Chris and Sweet Potato neared the end of their sidewalk, two shadowy characters shadowly emerged from the shadows.

The men brusquely identified themselves as representatives of an entity called V.A.S.T. Initially, they ignored Chris’s justifiable questions: Who sent them? How did they find him? What did they want? However, they soon broke down and explained that they were part of a team dedicated to, in their words, “makin’ basketball better ... however that may happen.” And though they refused to divulge their methods or reasoning, Chris allowed the two men to pitch their ideas.

After nearly four hours, the men had finished their presentation. Trusting the instincts that had taken him so far in life, Chris smelled something fishy. Yes, Sweet Potato had found an algae-ridden pond near the side of the road, from which she was giddily drinking (an act that would land her in the veterinarian’s office three days later). But that wasn’t what spooked Chris. It was the familiarity in the eyes of the V.A.S.T. minions, and also they singular devotion to their ideas. He knew that he mustn’t align with people of this ilk, and told them so.

Just then, Sweet Potato violently heaved, momentarily distracting Chris Paul. When he looked up, the men were gone.
DERRICK ROSE

One of the biggest jokey-jokes of the 2008-09 NBA season was Derrick Rose’s apparent refusal to smile. Some assumed that he was socially anxious, and therefore had little to smile about. Bulls fans pointed to this as evidence of his “killer instinct.” More brutal fans of other NBA teams had their laughs saying he was like a serial killer or a sociopath or a mime. Very funny, NBA fans.

But it’s likely that they wouldn’t poke fun at Derrick Rose if they knew why he didn’t smile: he can’t.

It’s an affliction that afflicts nearly 15 people worldwide with this terribly afflicting affliction, and it’s called Can’t Smile Syndrome (CSS). It’s not the most scientific term, but it’s certainly fitting. In CSS, the suffering subject is left without the necessary muscles needed to form a standard grin. Because of this horrible disease, CSS sufferers’ friends, family members and significant others are often left jaded or offended, since they do not receive the obvious positive feedback that a smile conveys. Here’s a sad example:

On Derrick Rose’s 6th birthday, his mother Brenda planned an extravagant celebration. His favorite yellow cake with chocolate frosting was ordered. Six clowns were booked for a battle royale (Derrick is still an enormous fan of Doink, the wrestling clown). Local rap superstars Do or Die were to perform a double-time rap entitled “Happy Birthday (Remix).” Needless to say, October 4, 1994 was going to be a big day in the Rose household.

As expected, Derrick ate the entire cake in a wordless trance in just under 20 minutes. Nearly comatose from this comically large sugar intake, Derrick patiently watched the Doink impersonators bludgeon each other in the Roses’ makeshift ring. Just when the final Doink was standing, Do or Die kicked off their birthday-heavy set. It was the perfect day, and Derrick was overjoyed. But unfortunately, he could not show it.

Brenda was devastated. Checking in with Derrick at increasingly shorter intervals, Brenda could not raise a reaction from her son. And though Derrick kept telling his mother how happy he was, since there was no accompanying smile, she assumed that he was mocking her. Understandably, Brenda became depressed and subsequently refused to celebrate Derrick’s birthday until he could teach himself to smile.

Finally, on his 18th birthday, when he was set to become an adult, Derrick Rose woke his mom from her sleep. He told her he loved her, and then unleashed the best smile he could. Because he had to use his eyebrow muscles to control the grin, the smile was warped and terrifying. But to Brenda Rose, it was a smile, and it was beautiful.
DERON WILLIAMS

There are a lot of clichés in the basketball world. Explosive players are called “explosive,” even if there is little to no evidence that a player has ever spontaneously combusted on the court. Athletes who are particularly tall or lanky are often called “long,” which is a nice way of saying “gawky.” And of course, one of the most clichéd clichés refers to a player who has tremendous dribbling ability, who is said to “have the ball on a string,” a clear reference to yo-yoing. While it is certainly illegal to attach a ball to a string during a regulation game, this cliché persists. But in one player’s case, it’s a little truer than the rest.

Deron Williams is considered by most pundits to be the second-best point guard in the National Basketball Association, behind only Chris Paul (see page 18). Naturally, every Utahan and greater than 98% of all Mormons consider Williams to be the best point guard on Earth, while denying the presence of Paul, much like they shun mainstream Christianity’s Nicene Creed. Nonetheless, Williams is lauded for his ball control and ability to manipulate defenders using his dribble. And while Williams is certainly proud of his devastating crossover maneuver, he is even more proud of his actual yo-yo skills.

Introduced to the yo-yo by his father Byron, Deron was instantly drawn to the spinning discs. Just like his father, he soon began competing in the bloodthirsty Texas yo-yo circuit, a series of competition that has produced every national champion yo-yoer since 1976. It was on the circuit that Deron became wise to the ways of the world. Though Deron was an amiable child, he soon developed the killer instinct he so often displays on the basketball court. Where other children would share yo-yo tips between their carefully choreographed routines, Deron and his father devised a sense-deprivation apparatus that allowed for maximum concentration. Shunning his fellow competitors, Deron became a socially paralyzed child. However, he is widely credited with developing now-legendary moves such as “The Devil Drop,” “Flapjacks” and, of course, “The West Texas Whip Snapper.”

Unfortunately for Deron, his national championship hopes were dashed as he grew. Like many child prodigies, he crippling social awkwardness lead to a breakdown at age 13. Hoping to make friends, rather than alienating everyone but his father, Deron joined his middle-school basketball team, leaving the yo-yo behind forever. He has vowed to never again let a string grace his middle finger, but many Jazz insiders claim that he has mandated that each and every Jazz employee refer to his crossover as “The Whip Snapper.” It’s just like that old saying: Give a kid a yo-yo and he’ll yo-yo for a day; teach a kid to yo-yo and he’ll give everything silly nicknames.
RUSSELL WESTBROOK

The NBA Cares program began as a good-natured charity program in 2005. In its four years, the program has raised more than 105 million dollars for its various charities. In theory, the program is designed to give children places to learn and role models to learn from. In reality, however, it has helped to serve as a massive disinformation program with secretive affiliations with the United States’ Drug Enforcement Agency. While this may seem scandalous, the work that the NBA Cares program has done on behalf of the DEA has helped to revitalize the more rural locales in the league, primarily in Oklahoma City.

As most fans know, the current Oklahoma City Thunder basketball franchise descends from the Seattle SuperSonics heritage. It was a particularly nasty divorce that lead to the move from Washington to Oklahoma, but if the public were privy to David Stern’s true reasoning, they would surely be more accepting of the relocation. While Seattle fans would remain justifiably crushed by losing their team, they would surely understand and appreciate the efforts by the NBA to eliminate methamphetamine abuse in Oklahoma. The Thunder move was just the first step in this process.

The SuperSonics moved from Seattle to Oklahoma in August of 2008, just weeks after drafting UCLA’s Russell Westbrook in that summer’s draft. Armed with an explosive athlete of Westbrook’s caliber, and cloaked in the shadow of the NBA Cares program, Stern and the newly minted Thunder set about systematically destroying meth lab after meth lab in and around Oklahoma City.

It wasn’t easy. Oklahoma City is America’s meth capitol of America, a fact that is proudly displayed on their oversized water tower. At the time, some reports put the number of functioning meth labs in the Greater Oklahoma City area at nearly 250,000, just about one lab for every other person (for non-math majors, that’s a lot of labs). Stern was committed to closing each and every one, and now that he had Westbrook, he had a chance.

As most great plans are, the plan was convoluted. Each night, Westbrook would find the most rundown looking house he could find, ring the doorbell, and ask the home’s owner if they were running a meth lab. If they said yes, he’d sprint in the house and punch the main meth cauldron as hard as he could, rendering it useless. If they said no, he’d ask them to recommend the nearest meth lab.

As one can imagine, the plan failed. Owners never admitted to having meth labs and were reluctant to reveal the locations of known labs. However, Westbrook’s abundant face time with the people of Oklahoma City ensured that he became a fan favorite, and that Oklahoma City was validated as a viable NBA home.

Too bad about the meth though. Seemed like a flawless plan.
RAY ALLEN

Not all professional basketball players assume their path to greatness at a young age. Just as in any avenue, success stories come from all walks of life. Sure, stories abound of accomplishments in youth leagues, getting moved up to the varsity team before entering high school, or a first slam-dunk before the age of 6. But just as often, a player will come out of nowhere to become a basketball superstar. Such is Ray Allen’s story.

Born Walter Ray Allen in Merced, California, the future Ray Allen grew up a talent show prodigy on the vaunted California pageant circuit. Raised in a legendary stage family, Ray was tutored by talent show king Franklin Francis to become the greatest American talent show performer since, ironically, Allen’s future father-in-law, Joseph Adele. Francis schooled the youngster in many common talent show talents, and Allen eventually specialized in three: piano, knife throwing and crochet.

But all was not well. Though Allen ran rampant through the Bitty circuit (age 6 and under), amazing watchers statewide with his prodigious abilities, he encountered his first taste of defeat at age 9, at the hands of fellow California talent show entrant Jacque Vaughn. Shocked by his loss, Allen retreated to the relative anonymity of his elementary school basketball team.

Though it was initially intended as a distraction from the stress of talent show life, Allen came to find solace in basketball. Balancing his talent show obligations (Allen was earning more than five figures per appearance) with his newfound love of basketball, Allen used the constant motion of the court as an asylum from the thoughts that plagued him. Would he ever regain his pre-Vaughn bravado? Would he remember the notes of his next concerto? Would his plans to crochet a hat for every inner-city youth be dashed?

His calm and quiet on-court demeanor a stark contrast from his flamboyant, Elton John-inspired stage performances, Allen expressed his self-doubt through basketball. Just as he had mastered so many tricks, Allen would soon add another talent to his already impressive repertoire: the jump shot. Like piano and knife throwing before, Allen committed himself to the mechanics of the jump shot. Refusing to rest until he had perfected his form, Allen would stay up late in to the night, shooting nearly 2,500 jump shots each evening.

To this day, Allen is widely known for two things — his jump shot and his steely persona. What many don’t know, however, is that those very things come from Allen’s conquering his childhood trauma. Once considered the greatest talent show prodigy that has ever lived, Allen will go down as a Hall of Fame basketball player. Quite the consolation prize.
LEANDRO BARBOSA

In the late 1990s alpaca farming became a popular fad in the United States. Families in rural areas would devote numerous acres to these hairy and rank creatures, both for fun and for profit. Not only do alpacas have the finest wool of any of the camelids, they are also surprisingly fast. Able to travel at speeds up to 40 miles per hour, alpacas are a joy to ride. Given that their wool can be sold for exorbitant prices, owning and enjoying an alpaca farm is a no-brainer. No one knows this better than the Phoenix Suns’ Leandro Barbosa.

Born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Barbosa was raised in South America’s largest city. But as he got older, Leandro became more and more curious about what life was like outside the city. Feeling confined and oppressed by the metropolis, Barbosa wanted to be one with the land. With that in mind, Barbosa set out across Brazil to neighboring Columbia, in hopes of owning his own alpaca farm.

After saving up money for nearly 18 months, Leandro left for Columbia in 1996 at the age of 14. Upon crossing the border, Barbosa was amazed at the vast expanses of green fields and rocky hills that define the country. Immediately, Leandro began searching for an alpaca farmer who would cut him a deal. It was there that he met fellow traveler Emmanuel Ginobili (see page 29), who was also deeply interested in alpaca farming. These two future rivals pooled their money and purchased nearly 14 acres of undeveloped terrain that would serve as their alpaca farm.

Leandro took to the farming with great gusto, while Manu quickly became jaded with the political machinations that take place behind the scenes of all alpaca farms. In the summer of 1998, Ginobili returned to his native Argentina, leaving the farm to Barbosa. Leandro soon experienced success like he never had before. Only three months after Ginobili’s departure (and almost two years of scraping by with local wool sales), representatives from Tommy Hilfiger came to visit Barbosa’s alpaca farm, hoping to find inspiration for next summer’s clothing line.

Hilfiger was infatuated with the luxurious wool of Barbosa’s alpacas and submitted an offer on $13 million (US) to purchase the farm. A savvy negotiator, Barbosa agreed to the asking price, but also ensured that Hilfiger would construct uniforms from the wool for the basketball team that Barbosa would start upon his return to Brazil. Once back in Brazil, 13 million dollars richer and with 20 woolen uniforms, Barbosa founded the basketball team for Sociedade Esportiva Palmeiras where he would be discovered by scouts, launching a successful NBA career.
RAJA BELL

The Frost Art Museum at Florida International University is a huge draw for both students and visitors. The museum, which houses an enormous collection of Latin American and 20th Century American art, has been named Miami’s best museum four times. It is a hallmark of both the school and the community. Because of its roots as a student gallery, the museum continues to offer a showcase for FIU undergraduates. Of course, due to the success of the museum, the criteria for a showing is quite demanding, with the majority of students being turned away and being forced to show their work in the student center, which is a major slap in the face. But perseverance has always been one of Raja Bell’s strong suits.

After a successful freshman season at Boston University, Bell began to feel a calling. He had always been the artistic type in high school; never fitting in with the jock crowd his classmates thought he’d be a part of. Instead, Raja spent his time with like-minded people named Dipre, Asselyn, and Remi, going vegetarian, and painting detailed portraits of people he’d never seen before. His interest in classical arts put him at odds with the vibrant avant-garde scene in Boston. Feeling stifled, Raja transferred to Florida International, hoping to exhibit at the Frost Art Museum.

Upon his arrival, Raja immediately began what he referred to as his masterpiece (even eventually naming it “Master Piece”). Working mostly in secret, with no outside feedback, Raja spent hours and hours on his project. Soon the hours turned to days and the days turned to weeks. For an art student, this was strange behavior. For a basketball player it was unheard of. But Raja would not be contained. He’d go to class, go to practice, and then paint all night, stopping only to return to class.

When he finally approached the Frost Art Museum curators to submit his painting for exhibit consideration he was disappointed to learn that to show at the museum, one must be in the art program, something that Raja was not a member of. Alternately, he could submit a finished piece, but as he continued painting, Raja expanded the scope of his idea. So with no school affiliation and no finished project, Raja Bell chartered the first Idea Seminar. In this seminar, Raja spoke for 15 straight hours about his visions and how they would be translated in to his painting.

Stunned by his elaborate details and grandiose plans, the curators of the museum agreed to show Raja’s mural in the spring of 2000, after he had completed his senior season for the Panthers. Raja returned to work. When his mural was finally unveiled three years later, the massive “Master Piece” stunned art critics. It was another nine years before everyone realized that Raja had painted every player that would play even a single NBA minute during the 2008-2009 season.
KOBE BRYANT

Upon entering the league 13 years ago, Kobe Bryant caught a lot of flack for his similarity to basketball deity Michael Jordan. Evidence of Kobe’s Jordan fascination was present in his game, the way he walked and even the way he talked. (It is currently unknown if he had a crippling gambling addiction.) Because of this mimicry, Bryant became a divisive character among NBA fans. Some viewed him as a wannabe, while others thought he was the actual second coming. But if the general public had known how instrumental Kobe Bryant had been to Michael Jordan, they would have never heaped such scorn upon him.

The story probably begins in 1986, but for all intents and purposes, it could also being in 2006. After years of funding secret and oft-illegal research, Kobe Bryant and his team of rogue scientists had finally perfected a time machine. This basketball player and his group of 17 of the foremost experts in time travel had built a small device that, when implanted in an object (such as Kobe Bryant), could transport that object to any other point in time that that place existed.

After a December 19, 2006 loss against the Chicago Bulls, Bryant decided to test his experiment. Upon activating the device, he was instantly transported back to 1986, where he was now outside the old Chicago Stadium, as the United Center had not yet been built. Since it was night, Bryant waited until the morning to act on his plan.

When the Bulls arrived for the next night’s game against the Utah Jazz, Bryant snuck in to the stadium by acting as if he were a member of the Bulls. Once inside, Bryant waited until Jordan was alone outside the locker room. Now Kobe had his chance, and he approached Jordan.

After introducing himself as Kwame Brown, Kobe told Michael that he had something he wanted to show him. Jordan was a naïve youngster and agreed to escort Bryant to an adjacent practice court. At this ancillary court, Bryant stunned Jordan by displaying an array of feints and maneuvers that Bryant himself had learned from studying Jordan. Jordan, with his unmatched basketball genius, quickly internalized the moves and thanked this mysterious young man for his help. Satisfied and smugly knowing that he had actually just taught Michael Jordan moves that he would have created on his own in due time, Bryant returned to the future.

Jordan’s stubbornness prevented him from utilizing everything Bryant had taught him, but over time he incorporated all the skills that Kobe had displayed. Unfortunately for Kobe, his plan backfired. Jordan became known as the greatest player of all time, and Kobe became known as a biter. It was also this meddling with the past that resulted in one of the worst draft picks in history: Kwame Brown, 2001, number one overall.
VINCE CARTER

When Vince Carter was just a youngster, growing up just 76 miles from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, he dreamt of someday being a moon captain. Supportive parents that they are, Harry and Michelle Carter encouraged their son to pursue his dreams of this completely fictitious profession. Little did they know that this decision, a sound decision as it were, would lead to frustration and pain themselves, their son, and millions of NBA fans.

No one is quite sure where Vince came up with moon captaining anyway. Was it directing the path of the moon? Of course, that does not make sense since magnets and warlocks control the moon. Was it just a misheard utterance of “to the moon, captain” that Vince subsequently repeated and distorted? Nope. Vince made it quite clear that this was a real profession, not something he’d only heard about. Maybe he had not heard of astronauts, and was thinking of the people who pilot space shuttles, but growing up near two NASA bases makes that an unlikely happening. The origins remain unclear, but the results are quite evident. Because, as you know, Vince Carter grew to become one of the most explosive basketball players of all time.

If only he had wanted to be a basketball player. Things would have been so easy. But try as he might, Vince couldn’t convince himself that “professional basketball player” was anywhere near as impressive as “moon captain.” After all, there are nearly 400 NBA players each year, and by his estimation, he would have been the first moon captain. But in the meantime, Vince supposed, basketball player would do.

Unfortunately for Vince, it’s still the meantime, because, you surely remember, moon captain is not a thing. In fact, despite the extensive warnings, Googling, meetings with NASA executives, and other accoutrements that come with international fame and fortune, Vince remained adamant that he could become a moon captain, even going so far as to obtain a fabricated degree from the University of Outer Space, hoping it would “open some doors.” Doors were not opened.

Instead, Vince has pouted his way through season after season of professional basketball. On the few occasions that Vince has truly wowed his detractors, it has been a byproduct of his trying to replicate his secretive moon captain moves. In fact, in conversations with his closest friends, Vince considers his 2000 Dunk Contest performance to be his interview for his dream job.
RUDY FERNANDEZ

Rudy Fernandez was nervous to come to America. He had seen the way the country had chewed up and spit out his countryman Juan Carlos Navarro. He saw the way Jorge Garbajosa had been unceremoniously dismissed from the Raptors, just because he wanted to represent Espana in the world’s most famous basketball tournament, and he had heard the rumors that many in the Toronto organization called his friend “George,” a nickname he despised. And even though he wasn’t a Spaniard, Rudy Fernandez didn’t like the way America turned its back on Ricky Martin after _Sound Loaded_ didn’t have its own “Livin’ La Vida Loca” on it. Regardless of those facts, Rudy Fernandez agreed to play for the Portland Trailblazers.

Wanting to make the most of his time in the States, Rudy consulted his good friend Pau Gasol (see page 72). The most successful Spanish player in NBA history was a good resource, and Fernandez wanted to hear first-hand how Pau had made it in America. Surprisingly, Pau recommended a beard.

Though he had one the NBA’s Rookie of the Year award as a clean-shaven 21-year-old, Pau came in to his own once he began to sport facial hair. Rather than seeing this as an obvious coincidence, Pau was convinced that his beardedness was the secret to his success. And since Rudy Fernandez had looked up to Pau for years, he was a little concerned that he could not grow a proper beard. Pau assured him this would not be a problem, but Fernandez continued to worry.

Then 22, Fernandez had yet to shave his face. Hoping to make up for lost time, Fernandez bought in to the myth that if you shave your face, the hair grows back thicker. Oh, did he buy in. From June 28, 2007 (the day he was drafted) to October 28, 2008 (his first NBA game) Fernandez day and night. This is not an exaggeration. Each morning, before breakfast, he would shave. Then at night, before he went to bed, he would shave again. Against all odds, it was working.

By the time he arrived in Portland, Rudy Fernandez had a very Pau Gasol-ish beard. No, it didn’t cover all the areas of his face, nor was it very thick, but it definitely gave him a European vibe. As such, defenders refused to sag off Rudy, assuming he possessed a deadly jump shot. In turn, Rudy parlayed this easily attackable defense in to an ill-fated appearance in the 2009 Dunk Contest. Pau Gasol was right. All it takes to succeed in America is a little facial hair, no matter how silly it looks.
MANU GINOBILI

In the late 17th century, the Mapuche people unified all of Argentina. The Mapuches were a largely nomadic tribe and, as such, those traits are still present in many modern-day Argentineans. In fact, it is a right of passage in many Argentinean sects that a man should plan his own voyage away from home before reaching the age of 20. This voyage (called hombre de viaje by Argentineans) was of great importance to the Mapuches, and is in turn just as important to today's indigenous people. It was on his hombre de viaje that Emmanuel “Manu” Ginobili truly found the basketball player living inside him.

Like many Argentinean youth, Ginobili preferred to start his hombre de viaje early, in order to both extend it and to ensure that he had explored every aspect of his psyche. Hoping to visit all of South America, Ginobili left his home in Bahia Blanca in 1989 at age 12. Choosing to zigzag across the continent, his first destination was Chile. This turned out to be a wise choice, as they also have a large Mapuche population who taught Manu the ins and outs of farm life, a skill that would serve him well as he continued his journey.

After nearly 15 months in Chile, and after he'd learned all he could about life-sustaining farm techniques, Ginobili set on a path that would take him through Bolivia, Paraguay and southern Brazil. During his trek, he met many wonderful people and gleaned various pieces of advice from the most respected men in each village that he visited. One common thread seemed to exist in every man’s advice: Do what makes you happiest. Now all Manu had to do was find out what that was.

It was in Uruguay that he was first introduced to the joy of basketball. Now 16, Ginobili was naturally gifted at the game and quickly befriended the younger Esteban Batista, who would eventually go on to be the first Uruguayan basketball player. However, the friendship was short-lived as Ginobili continued upon his quest. As he made his way through Brazil, French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana and Venezuela, Ginobili kept in mind to “do what makes you happiest.” Now he knew what made him happiest was basketball.

After an ill-fated encounter with Leandro Barbosa (see page 24) in Colombia, Ginobili continued on through Ecuador and Peru. However, his hombre de viaje was no longer his sole passion. He now wanted, more than anything, to play basketball. Ginobili quickly finished his journey and returned to his homeland. There he started playing basketball fervently, eventually achieving his goal of getting to the NBA. Once again, the hombre de viaje had done its job: teaching a young man how to grow up.
BEN GORDON

When you consider the luminaries that have preceded him at shooting guard on the United States men’s national basketball team, it’s easy to see why Ben Gordon convinced everyone that he was British. Such stalwarts as Michael Redd, Kirk Hinrich, and Stephon Marbury have been integral parts of the Olympic and World Championship teams that there was no room for Ben Gordon. But he had a plan.

It started one day in practice with his good buddy Luol Deng. The two had known each other for years. They had battled during their college years, with Gordon winning a national title at UConn and Deng playing at Duke University. Then, they had been drafted just four places apart in the 2004 draft. They were buds, and buds love joking with each other. Especially these two buds.

During their rookie year, one seemingly innocuous “mate” at the end of Deng’s request that Gordon “toss that ball here, mate” set off a storm of Austin Powers jokes between the two. Gordon had seen each movie on opening night, and considered himself America’s foremost expert on the trilogy, so the quotes came easy to him. Deng, for his part, just thought they were saying random Cockney sayings, a common pastime in his native Sudan. This tradition carried on throughout the season, annoying teammates and coach Scott Skiles. That’s where the seed was planted.

Gordon was dying to be a part of international competition. He wanted to prove to the world that he was one of the best undersized shooting guards currently playing, and he needed the good people of Greece to know that. But there was no way he’d get a spot with those guys ahead of him. He needed to go somewhere else, and his buddy Luol Deng was going to be playing for England.

It was a long shot, but Ben Gordon was determined. He was sure that his being born on vacation in England, plus the fact that he was named Benjamin Gordon, and his mastery of the Austin Powers movies would convince British nationals that he was British enough. And he was right.

Of course, it had nothing to do with his slightly British sounding name or the Austin Powers vocabulary, but the fact that his parents just happened to be in England when he was born was enough. Of course, the Austin Powers quotes have had some effect. Turns out the British hate that movie, and have therefore yet to allow Gordon to suit up for a game. Crikey!
Prior to his arrival at Indiana University in 2007, Eric Gordon was heralded as one of the best high school players in the nation. Hailing from North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, Gordon was considered the best shooting guard in America, quite the lofty accomplishment. Joining five other well-regarded recruits at the fabled hoops academy, Hoosier fans were justifiably excited for their presumed return to prominence. Then Eric Gordon showed up.

He had always been a little bit chunky, but scouts had chalked that up to baby fat. That might seem a little strange for an 18-year-old, but Eric Gordon wouldn’t be the first teenager to see his body mature later than he’d hoped. But what had happened to Eric Gordon was something different. Where were his cheekbones? Why was his head so round? Why did he insist on wearing a t-shirt underneath his jersey? Indiana fans, experts on the subject, quickly realized this as the telltale signs of fatness.

How had this happened? What would become of their now-fleeting return to greatness? Can a fat guy still play shooting guard? Indianans are an inquisitive people, so the questions kept coming. But the first of the second set of questions was the most pressing. How, in just three months, had Eric Gordon gone from baby fat to normal fat? The answer, perhaps, is not surprising. He won a dare.

Being from a landlocked state, Gordon, to this day, considers any seafood a delicacy. So when his old friend, and AAU teammate, Greg Oden proposed his dare, Gordon couldn’t turn it down. The parameters were simple. Oden would obtain one fully-grown male walrus (estimated weight: 3,500 pounds), and Gordon would eat it. If he could eat the entirety of the walrus meat (no bones or tusks), Oden would pay for the Walrus. If he couldn’t, the cost was Eric Gordon’s.

Generous man that he is, Greg Oden allowed Gordon the entire summer to eat the creature. Though that certainly eased the task, 1,000 pounds of walrus meat a month is an almost insurmountable task. Unless, apparently, you’re Eric Gordon.

Gordon devoured the beast, finishing two weeks ahead of schedule. Much like the Indiana fans who would see Gordon soon enough, Oden was shocked. Unlike the fans, he was delighted. After all, he had just convinced his good friend (and conference opponent) to eat an entire walrus. The added weight slowed Gordon’s game, but not enough to keep him from being the 7th pick in the 2008 NBA draft. Since that summer, he hasn’t eaten a sliver of seafood, nor taken a phone call from Greg Oden.
It was during the summer after the 2006-07 basketball season that Allen Iverson first got to enjoy the majestic nature of the Rocky Mountains. He had just finished his first half-season with the Denver Nuggets, a season that saw him finish first in the NBA in minutes per game for the second year in a row. In fact, Iverson had never finished lower than third in minutes per game since an eighth place showing his rookie year. Needless to say, Allen Iverson is in phenomenal shape.

It had been seven months since the trade from the Philadelphia 76ers, more than enough time to acclimate his lungs to the thin Colorado air. As such, Iverson felt no qualms about his first hiking expedition. His wife, Tawanna, had been bugging him for months to take her out on the trails near their prestigious Beaver Creek home, but since he was in-season, they hadn't yet found an opportunity. But now the San Antonio Spurs had eliminated the Nuggets and Iverson was quite willing to hike with his wife.

It was a sunny day when Tawanna and Allen set off on their first hike. Like many men, Allen was not closely involved with the day's planning and had no idea where, or for how long, they would be hiking. Nonetheless, as a good husband, Iverson set his mind to enjoying this hike. “It’s just walking up a hill,” he thought.

Unbeknownst to Allen, his wife had chosen a trail walking directly in to the rising sun. And while Coloradans will go on and on about their lack of humidity, walking facing the sun is still really hot. Iverson was soon miserable from the heat, not to mention the uneventful path they were on. He had always considered hiking to be actually hiking — over boulders, through streams and just generally conquering nature. What they were doing was hardly that; rather, they were ducking through the woods, a mere 10 feet from a paved road that led to sizable mansions.

Though in phenomenal basketball shape, Iverson was hardly prepared for the hike. The combination of elevation, sweat and zero shade cover quickly soured his mood. But since it was his wife's planning, he kept his mouth shut. Once Tawanna realized that Allen was miserable, she assured him it was OK to turn back, since they had another 90 minutes just to reach the halfway point. While Allen was thankful to stop this supposed hike, he also was a little ashamed when a 60-year-old British man jauntily passed them. When the man asked, “Is this the way back to the village? I don't know the way because I came over the mountain,” Iverson knew he wasn’t cut out for Colorado.
JOE JOHNSON

Born somewhere in some year, Joe Johnson was raised by parents, obviously. His parents held jobs and they also liked to do various leisure activities. In fact, Joe took after his parents, as he also liked to do various leisure activities. Furthermore, Joe would grow up to have a job.

While he was a child, Joe did some things. No one is quite sure what sort of things Joe did, but it is accepted beyond a shadow of a doubt that Joe Johnson, at some point in time, did do some things. Things that may or may not have included: customizing a paintball gun, building a canoe and/or some other things. Also, he may have knitted. However, the true nature of Joe Johnson's childhood has been lost over time.

One time, Joe did this one thing that amazed a lot of people. People in his hometown of Wherever He Was Born were shocked and pleasantly surprised that young Joe Johnson had done this thing. Unfortunately, the thing he did remains unknown and it is unlikely that the nature of this happening will ever be discovered. But please, rest assured that said incident is surely awe-inspiring. If not, the people in that town are liars, and the public is better off not having to deal with their deceitful ways.

After graduating from high school (likely, but never confirmed), Joe Johnson attended the University of Arkansas or Arkansas University, which are essentially the same place. While at this Arkansas state college, Johnson did some things pretty well on the basketball court. It is highly probable that he set numerous records while playing for the Razorbacks, but since the Internet had not yet been introduced in the state, no one is sure. Nonetheless, given Johnson's skill and the fact that Arkansas had not had a relevant basketball player since Corliss Williamson, it is likely that previously set records were broken, leaving Johnson the holder of these records.

Since coming to the NBA, Johnson has continued to do things. He used to be on the Suns but then he decided he did not like being unknown anymore (supposedly he was frustrated by no one remembering anything about him EVER), so he said to the Suns Gorilla, “Trade me.” While the Gorilla has little to no say in any Phoenix Suns personnel matters, upper management overheard Johnson’s request and they were pretty upset, according to their diaries. After they finished crying into their pillows, they traded Johnson to the Atlanta Hawks for a French guy and some draft picks. Ironically, people usually forget that Joe Johnson ever played for the Phoenix Suns.
KEVIN MARTIN

While it is true in all cultures, in Native American society the passing down of skills, stories and other cultural ephemera are of utmost importance. This creates a sense of unity, both in modern times and as a connection to their past. Furthermore, these tribes are often very protective of their traditions, hoping to keep a little bit of themselves alive for as long as possible.

Sometimes, however, under extenuating circumstances, an Indian tribe will take in an outsider and teach him their way of life. This is no ordinary happening. The proud and respected leaders must agree to immerse this foreigner in their culture. To date, this has only happened to one NBA player: the Sacramento Kings’ Kevin Martin.

Raised in Zanesville, Ohio, Martin was fascinated by the bygone era of the Erie Indians, and at the age of 13, set out on a ritualistic pilgrimage to find his spiritual forbears. While the Erie had once freely roamed the lands, finding still-functioning sects was a nearly impossible task. Only by luck did Martin eventually stumble across the remnants of a settlement. Thanks to his years of study of these people, Martin knew the secret pattern necessary to access the hidden pulley system that would lower him deep into the heart of their underground lair.

Though originally frightened by this intrusion, the Erie chiefs quickly accepted Martin. His devotion to and careful research of their ways endeared the young boy to the fearsome war chiefs. After completing the ritualistic shucking of 10,000 ears of corn, Martin was granted full membership in the Erie tribe.

Now a naturalized member of the Tribe, Martin’s athleticism was immediately put to use. Just as he had expected, the Erie war panel sought to use him as a weapon of sorts in their centuries-long subterranean battle with the Chippewa. Martin’s height, lighter colored skin and hi-top fade terrified the Chippewa, and his mastery of the bow-and-arrow (fashioned from the bones of a long deceased deer) helped drive the remaining Chippewa from their underground luxury hotel.

The Erie were elated. For years they had lived in their tunnels, caves and other holes in the ground. Now they spent their days and nights enjoying the warmth and coziness of down comforters, 1000 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets and soap that smelled like pickled ginger. Martin was granted chiefhood and, as such, was allowed to live above ground. As a tribute to his tribe, Martin patterned his jump shot to appear as if he is pulling an arrow back from a bow. It is said that each time he shoots said jumper, a series of chants can be heard from deep within the bowels of Ohio.
OJ MAYO

A lot of things happened in OJ Mayo’s only year at the University of Southern California. First and foremost, people outside of the Pac-10’s target audience cared about Trojan basketball (or pretended to) for all of five months. Furthermore, people somewhat seriously considered the prospects of a team lead by a freshman for the national title, generally an insane consideration, and in this case, proven insane after USC’s first round upset. In a roundabout way, this season somehow lead to rapper Master P’s son getting a college basketball scholarship, a feat almost as implausible as his father having a signature basketball shoe made by the brand that once outfitted Michael Jordan. Additionally, OJ Mayo may or may not have (but probably was) been paid to play basketball prior to and during the season, crippling the program in the near future. Needless to say, this was an important season for Trojan basketball.

But something that went entirely unreported during Mayo’s somewhat disappointing stint in Los Angeles was his eating habits. As a future number three NBA draft pick Mayo should have been carefully monitoring his diet and training for the next level; considering his single-minded devotion to marketing and future success as a professional, it’s shocking that he chose, in just one arena, to be a normal college student. Rather than following a carefully designed nutrition plan, Mayo’s entire sustenance from September 2007 to March 2008 consisted of David sunflower seeds and Arizona brand Arnold Palmer iced tea.

As one of America’s largest sunflower seed markets (behind only Mobile, Alabama) a plethora of seed flavors were available to Mayo. Typically, for breakfast Mayo would enjoy just the seed, with the shell having been cracked and discarded by an intern appointed by the university. For lunch, Mayo would choose between jalapeno or barbeque flavors, depending on if that night’s game was home or away. At nights, Mayo preferred the milder ranch flavor, which would help to relax him before bed.

When Mayo went to combine workouts, NBA executives were shocked by his bloated appearance and 45 pounds of extra heft. Mayo was unwilling to admit his eating habits had caused him to gain the “freshman fifteen times three,” told the scouts the scales must be heavy and that his mom had accidentally shrunk his shirts when he took them home to be washed. He then set about losing the weight. Since the majority of the poundage came from increased water retention from his absurd salt intake, he quickly slimmed down. When he hosted his private workout just two months later, scouts were amazed at his transformed body. This dedication, they said, justified his draft position just one slot behind Greg Oden and Kevin Durant.
MICHAEL REDD

The meaning of “renaissance man” is multifaceted, much like the “renaissance man” himself. One definition is polymath, or a person whose knowledge is not restricted to one field. Another is a person who lived during the Renaissance. The last definition is Leonardo Da Vinci, who actually lived during the Renaissance and had knowledge that was not restricted to one field. In essence, Leonardo Da Vinci is the definition of a “renaissance man,” while he is also a definition of “renaissance man.” If this seems like circular logic, that’s because it is. But it’s also sound.

It’s also a long-winded way of introducing Michael Redd’s many, many non-basketball areas of expertise. For instance, it’s not widely known that Michael Redd, aside from being a shooting guard for the Milwaukee Bucks, is also an Internet entrepreneur. Among his most prized accomplishments is his print-to-order business mailing business.

Michael’s Mailers (www.michaelsmailers.com) was started while Michael was still at Ohio State University. In order to pay for his Rogaine and apartment, Redd needed a job that was not terribly time-intensive. During this time, the Internet was in the midst of its first boom, showing exponential growth in the commerce sector. Realizing that these new Internet millionaires needed business mailers, Redd seized the opportunity. Offering high quality business mailers at low prices, Redd oversaw the production and shipping of his product at a Columbus Kinko’s. But unlike many of the start-ups of the first boom, Michael’s Mailers remain successful to this day.

Another of Redd’s businesses is his knitting company, Knitting by Michael, which combines Redd’s business sense and his love of knitting. Taught by his grandmother at a young age, Knitting by Michael provides high-end knitted clothing to a select list of clients. Redd takes orders throughout the basketball season, and then uses extended road trips and the offseason to produce the garments for his big-ticket customers. Fellow NBA stars Kevin Garnett, Andres Nocioni, and Jason Williams (the white one) have been known to sport Redd’s monochromatic pants, shirts, and hats when going out on the town.

Perhaps the most notable of Redd’s off-court interests is his ferret ranch, located in his native state of Ohio. The Rerrett Ranch is home to more than 5,000 abandoned ferrets from states as wide ranging as North Dakota, Mississippi, and Delaware. Through strict admissions requirements, the ferrets are disease-free and clawless, and are therefore allowed to roam free on the nearly 400-acre ranch. Home to its own Whole Foods Market and miniature knitting supply store, The Rerrett Ranch is considered the world’s finest ferret lodge.

Business, knitting, and philanthropy have always been close to Michael Redd’s heart. Through determination and dedication, he has used his superstar status to further these worthy causes. In a land where athletes are called selfish, self-centered, and shellfish-adverse, Michael Redd is a breath of ferret-scented air.
JASON RICHARDSON

Outside of maybe Wilt Chamberlain and Sam Perkins, Michael Jordan is the most influential basketball player of all time. Though not everyone liked Michael, they certainly respected his game and are capable of realizing everything he did for basketball. Additionally, Jordan emerged just as the NBA was growing, both financially and into many television markets. By the time he retired (the second time), there wasn’t much we didn’t know about Michael.

Many of today’s players grew up during Michael Jordan’s heyday, and because of that, they’ve co-opted a lot of his iconic style. All around the league, you’ll see balding men who shave their heads because that’s what Michael did. You’ll also see guys like Michael Redd who should shave their heads but haven’t, even when they know they should because that’s what MJ would do. Of course, Kobe Bryant’s first 10 seasons in the league were a virtual homage to Michael Jordan. Simply put, many of the things that are commonplace in today’s NBA are because of Michael Jordan.

Naturally, some players have picked up on some of Michael’s less important idiosyncrasies. One of these players is Jason Richardson. Obviously, there is his choice of number 23 for every team he has played for, stretching back at least to his Michigan State days. But less noticeable to most casual NBA fans is Richardson’s bizarre tribute to the legendary “practice shorts under game shorts” that became a part of Jordan’s mystique.

It started as an accident in high school. Richardson’s car had broken down prior to a huge game against his rivals. In a hurry and wanting some Jordan luck for the game, Richardson slipped his Arthur Hill Lumberjacks shorts on over the cargo shorts he had worn to school. Because he preferred baggy shorts, his uniform easily covered his bulky cargos. In his haste, Richardson had forgotten to remove his phone, wallet, keys and Diamond Rio MP3 player from his shorts’ multiple pockets. Nonetheless, Richardson scored 48 points in the victory.

Since that game, Richardson has worn the cargo shorts under whatever game shorts he happened to be wearing. Not only does this find its origins in his quest for a little bit of Jordan’s aura, it’s also a reminder to play like a kid. Yes, the weight of the shorts and their contents may slow him down a little, but to Jason Richardson, it’s worth it to remember the good old days.
BRANDON ROY

To many, Sasquatch is a myth, or a fun children’s story. Though generally discredited by scientists and academics, the legend of the Sasquatch (alternately “Bigfoot” or “Yeti”) has persisted for decades, primarily in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Most assume that this supposedly ape-like creature is a bear, a hoax or some other easily discounted non-phenomenon. But to others — Brandon Roy, for instance — Sasquatch is all too real.

Born and raised in the heart of Sasquatch country (Seattle, Washington), Roy was accustomed to the assumedly tall tales that have been passed down from generation to generation. As far away as Spokane, there had always been rumors that Sasquatches had attacked fishermen, seeking to steal their salmon.

Or worse. Like most, Roy did not believe. If Sasquatches were so abundant, he thought, then why hadn’t they even been truly captured on film? But in other respects, Brandon wasn’t like most people.

With a curiosity as prodigious as his basketball talent, Roy sought the truth. His propensity for logic dictated the necessity for a plan; he would journey into the forest near Mt. Teneriffe (a notorious hotbed of Sasquatch activity during the early 1960s) in search of eyeball evidence of this possibly mystical creature. Armed with a handheld pellet gun, enough food, water and supplies for 14 days, and a topographical map of the area, Roy hoped to prove what so many had sought for so long.

Mt. Teneriffe was fraught with peril. Not only would Roy have to contend with possibly encountering this potentially deadly monster, but he also was forced to endure dangerous conditions, such as a dense canopy that caused temperatures to drop significantly below freezing each night. As he journeyed deeper and deeper into the thick forest, Roy began to lose hope. And his sanity. Had he packed enough supplies? Was he really alone? And most importantly, how would he react upon encountering a Sasquatch?

In the years since his expedition, Roy has been reticent to give details of his findings. Some assume that he was sworn to secrecy by these humanoid creatures. Others claim that there was nothing to be found. Only one thing can be sure. At age 15, Brandon Roy showed something that would benefit him greatly in his basketball life: courage and industriousness in the face of uncertainty. Applying these principals to his game has made Roy one of the NBA’s brightest young stars, a myth unto himself.
PEJA STOJAKOVIC

Basketball is the sort of game that runs deep in families. Part of this is genetic. If there’s a tall dad, there’s a good chance he plays basketball. And if he’s tall, there’s a good chance that he passes his height down to his son or daughter, who in turn uses that to play basketball. Numerous punnet square tests have proven this theory true, and Gregor Johann Mendel himself has shown that basketballing is a trait that is inherited. You can’t argue with science.

But an even bigger part of familial interest in a sport is the bond that it creates between a father and a child. It’s not uncommon to see a father and son playing one-on-one at a local park, or on the same church league men’s team. Fathers are often our first coaches, and what we learn from them serves as the baseline of our basketball knowledge. Then, there are the fathers who continue to teach their kids far after the kids want their instruction. Such is the case with Predrag Stojakovic and his father, Miodrag.

As any scholar of Serbian national basketball will tell you, Miodrag Stojakovic is a legend. Whether it is for his record setting three point shot or his innovative hair-based jersey, Miodrag was the most famous athlete in Eastern Europe for all of the 1970s. Then he had a son.

Predrag was born June 9, 1977 and was soon hailed as the chosen one in Serbia. His father, hoping to shield his son from the hype, practiced a particularly brutal form of tough love. As soon as Predrag was able to walk, Miodrag brought him to the basketball court. From day one of Predrag’s basketball education, Miodrag refused to go easy on his son, beating him by a score of 11-0, though Predrag was only two years old.

As he got older, Predrag grew and grew. He also got better at basketball, just to spite his father. When his father would say that every shot is out of his range, Predrag worked his hardest to become a lights-out perimeter shooter. When his dad said that Chandler was his favorite character on Friends, Predrag styled his hair like Ross. And when Miodrag nicknamed his son Peja, Serbian for “beardless sissy boy,” Predrag grew the thinnest, darkest beard anyone has ever seen.

Soon Predrag’s fame had even outgrown that of his father, and he joined the NBA. To his credit, Predrag credits his father with making him such a player. Every summer, he returns to Serbia, where Miodrag insults him on everything from his hairless shoulders to his choice of number. It’s no coincidence that Predrag’s favorite song is “A Boy Called Sue” by Johnny Cash.
JASON TERRY

In the summer of 2009, Dallas hip-hop duo TrilliTrill’s “Do the Jason Terry” became an overnight sensation. Literally. One day, we were all doing the Charleston and then literally the next day we were doing the Jason Terry. Every single person in America made that change independently. It was like some Kevin Nealon Mr. Subliminal voodoo hocus pocus action. Not in a good way.

But that’s not the point, even though it’s kind of the point. The real point is that since we are all humans, we all know what the Jason Terry is (it is running around with your arms spread wide, as if you were an airplane). It was a harrowing 24 hours. No one knew if they would ever again be able to return their arms to their sides. Grocery store aisles were packed. It was very hard to drive, and because of that, there were numerous automotive accidents.

Lost in this national dance craze was the man behind the dance, the original Jason Terry. For whatever reason, it never crossed anyone’s mind to interview Terry about the damage his reckless celebrating had caused. In all likelihood, he would have been interviewed, but the inability to hold a microphone anywhere a mouth prevented this. However, if the interrogation had taken place, authorities would have quickly discovered the truth behind the dance.

It’s a simple story really. Following the signing of his contract extension in the summer of 2003, and now far wealthier than he could have ever imagined, Terry finally could afford the cosmetic Botox that his shoulders so badly needed. An ill-advised weight-lifting program had left Terry with massive shoulders (later found to have been mistakenly given to him rather than teammate Hann Mottola). The gigantic shoulders not only limited Terry’s effectiveness, they also looked entirely out of place, causing Terry to rid himself of the muscles.

Of course, drastic weight gain and loss results in some serious stretch marks, and Jason Terry’s shoulders were no different. Wanting this corrected, Terry bought massive doses of cheap Botox from a shady Atlanta pharmacist. Upon injecting the toxin, Terry shoulder joints became completely locked at the perpendicular line of his shoulder. This meant that Terry was often spotted with arms extended, as if he were an airplane.

To us, the Jason Terry was a mysterious and terrifying dance craze. To Jason Terry, the Jason Terry is a reminder of the darkest months of his life, and also a pretty terrible song.
In 2006, Dwyane Wade was one of the NBA's brightest, fastest rising stars. By 2008, some wondered if he had burned out. After suffering injuries to both his left knee and left shoulder, many feared that Wade would never be the same, that his reckless drives in to the heart of a defense would never return. Wade, however, had other ideas. Fully recuperated from his injuries, the Miami shooting guard had the best individual season of his career. Making great impacts on both the offensive and defensive ends of the court, Dwyane Wade was back and better than ever.

But how could a dinged-up, aging guard, who'd seemingly had his best weapon (his body) taken from him, come back with such ability? Some called it black magic. Others, witchcraft. The most nefarious whispered that most feared of words: steroids.

As is usually the case, the answer is more innocent, but also more troubling.

Shortly after being deactivated for the remainder of the 2007-08 season, Variegated Advance Scientific Technologies (V.A.S.T.) contacted Dwyane Wade. After their successes with Tim Duncan's cyborg endoskeleton (see page 70), V.A.S.T. pitched Wade a full-scale implant. The proposed implant would afford him the mobility that he was accustomed to while also giving him the strength and indestructibility that he so greatly desired. Wade was easily sold.

After nearly 17 hours in surgery, Dwyane Wade emerged with entirely rebuilt innards. Wade's inner organs and overlying muscles were retained, but his bones, tendons and connective tissues were replaced with space age polymers. Since this was V.A.S.T.'s first full-body implant, some problems arose. When calculating the size needed to remake Dwyane Wade, for example, V.A.S.T. scientists included Wade's muscles in their measurements. After the muscles were added to the implant, Wade was left noticeably bulkier than before he was injured. Additionally, a white polymer was used, though Wade had requested navy blue in honor of Marquette University.

Wade first unleashed his new superskeleton at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. His teammates were amazed with his new speed, size and all-around physical ability. Quickly, Wade re-established himself as a player on par with Kobe Bryant (see page 26) and LeBron James (see page 54). His successful play continued through the 2008-09 season, where Wade had one of the most dominant seasons by a guard in the history of the league. And though only two players know how Dwyane Wade came back bigger, faster and stronger, only one knows the terrifying reason why.
DELonE WEST

‘Twas a pleasant surprise when Delonte West grew out his hair during the 2008-09 season. Not only was the basketball-loving public elated that West had matured from his slightly scary Boston Celtic days, they were also delighted to have another proud redhead in the league. For too long, the likes of Brian Scalabrine and Matt Bonner had represented the proud tribe of red-haired individuals. It wasn’t since Bill Walton’s heyday that these oft-scorned people had a hero to call their own. West’s red mini-Afro was a sign of hope.

West was happy both for the attention he was getting with his new hair choice, and that a far smaller number of children were frightened by him, but it wasn’t all aesthetics. In fact, West’s well-received hair growth was part of an exciting experiment that could revolutionize the automobile industry, as we know it. Frankly, Detroit should be more ashamed than they already are.

Delonte West had the idea for years. He figured everybody on Earth has hair, so that is a lot of hair. Ergo, hair is the most plentiful and unlimited natural resource available to man. Of course, West had no idea how to get energy out of hair or how to monetize this revelation or even how he could use the energy. It wasn’t a very well considered plan, but West was right; planet Earth does have a lot of hair.

When he was traded to the Cleveland Cavaliers in February of 2008, West realized the great opportunity he was presented with. Teamed with V.A.S.T. founder LeBron James (see page 54), West pitched the corporation his hair-based energy plan. Not surprisingly, the conglomerate agreed to fund the experiment, as long as West would serve as its spokesman and main hair provider. West agreed, and began growing his hair.

By the beginning of the next season, West’s hair was long enough to begin the combustion process. It was quite the surprise that West’s plan was successful. Quickly V.A.S.T. moved the hair motor experiment to the top of their priority list, hoping to use its profits to fund their more dubious enterprises. This was a surprise to Delonte, who had grown to love his long hair.

He was heart-broken when V.A.S.T. and LeBron James forced him to cut his hair prior to the Eastern Conference Finals, but he had signed the contract that gave V.A.S.T. complete control of his hair. Not only did he love the look, but he also felt that he derived strength from it. When the Cavaliers were eliminated from the playoffs by the Magic, James knew he had made a mistake by shearing West. Of course, V.A.S.T.’s motto (“Anything for Progress”) would tell you differently.
CARMELO ANTHONY

There are three things in competition for Carmelo Anthony's heart. Basketball, of course, is a top competitor. It's more than just Carmelo's livelihood; he has always considered the court his refuge from whatever else may be going on in his life. Another, naturally, is his beautiful family. Fiancée La La Vasquez and their son Kiyan are constantly in Anthony's thoughts, and he has pledged to ensure that they have good lives. However, what many people don't know is Carmelo's true passion — the thing that he loves more than anything else in the world.

Space travel.

Many children are fascinated with aeronautics as children. Some even go so far as to attend the oft-ridiculed Space Camps common in many cities along the Eastern seaboard. The most dedicated will devote their lives to the remote possibility that they will be among the chosen few who can call themselves astronauts. Carmelo Anthony is simultaneously all and none of these.

Sure, he has had an almost maniacal devotion to cosmology since he was a child. But growing up in the ghettos of Baltimore, Anthony was unable to afford the Space Camps that he coveted, a true misfortune as Maryland is home to more than 5000 individual Space Camps. As such, Carmelo soon abandoned his dream of one day orbiting Earth or getting stranded behind the Moon (it is common knowledge that Anthony's favorite movie is Apollo 13 and he has said the perfect way to die is in space).

But do dreams ever really die? Carmelo Anthony thinks they don't. Much like Ron Artest taking time off to promote a mediocre singing group, Anthony requested time off to fulfill his life's goal. In March 2009, Carmelo chartered his own space mission, paid for with his massive basketball fortune. Along with teammate Chauncey Billups (see page 4), Anthony enjoyed nearly three weeks in outer space, just enough time to circumnavigate both Earth and the Moon.

In order to keep Nuggets administration ensured of his safety, Carmelo began emailing a series of missives entitled Carmelo Anthony's Space Adventure Letters, which were subsequently posted on Internet weblog The Blowtorch (www.theblowtorch.net). These nonsensical missives touched on such varied subjects as what creatures they had encountered, which movies Billups enjoyed on his portable DVD player and numerous space referencing puns. Eventually a book of the collected letters was published, spending 18 weeks atop The New York Times' paperback nonfiction best-seller list.

Upon his return, Carmelo was a changed man. His already commendable charity work was nearly doubled as Carmelo Anthony's Aeronautics Academy was opened in the summer of 2009. The school serves as a destination for inner-city youths who hope to follow Carmelo Anthony in to the depths of space. It is truly commendable that Anthony would use his position and power to open for others the doors that were closed for him. You could say, in fact, that it's out of this world.
RON ARTEST

Remember when Ron Artest, then a member of the Indiana Pacers, charged into the stands of The Palace at Auburn Hills, hell-bent on destroying some schmuck who had thrown a beer on him? Of course you do. It was everywhere and, truth be told, it was pretty awesome.

Well, the aftermath might not have been so great. Artest was in the midst of his best season. The Pacers were contenders for an NBA title, defeating the reigning champion Pistons, a team that would make it all the way to the NBA Finals. All of that was dashed. Maybe that part wasn’t awesome.

And maybe the reputation that Artest developed afterwards wasn’t the best, either. He sat out the remaining 73 games of the 2004-05 season, the longest non-drug or gambling related suspension ever. He was the NBA’s bad boy, with good reason; and upon his return, naturally, he asked for a trade. Probably not the most endearing move, but definitely a surefire way to alienate the teammates who had supported you during your suspension. Oh, and you had ruined their potential championship season the year before. That part, too, wasn’t awesome.

Also not awesome: The resulting black eye given to the entire NBA. Sure, the NBA had been considered thuggish, unapproachable and filled with prima donnas before the brawl. But now, that reputation seemed pretty well-deserved. After all, Artest had punched about 20 random fans on the way to go fight the guy who threw the beer on him, ultimately settling for a guy who was near the beer-thrower. That’s not the best way to keep the fans who had stuck around, and certainly not the way to win new fans (unless these fans were searching for something before the explosion of mixed martial arts). Once again, this result wasn’t so awesome.

So, considering the facts that Artest ruined his team, himself and, for a period of time, the NBA, maybe the whole PunchFest 2k4 wasn’t awesome. But then again, if you just watch the video, and don’t consider the completely horribly atrocious outcomes, you’ll agree: Pretty awesome.
RENALDO BALKMAN

Renaldo Balkman was born in Staten Island, New York at exactly midnight on July 14, 1984 known since as Balkman’s Folly. Due to this unlikely happening, it was prophesied that he would be blessed with stamina equivalent to 1.65 times that of a normal man. Since this happened in Staten Island, the prophesy came from a Wu-Tang Clan B-side, as most of the best prophesies do. This one was extra special, for it fortold the next great New York City hustle player.

However, if Balkman were to ever cut his hair, this power would be stripped from him. As with most Wu-Tang Clan prophesies, this utterance came from a bizarre translation of an already-established religious text and was therefore pretty confusing after careful consideration. That it was a RZA lyric certainly did not help.

These translation problems caused myriad confusion for the Balkman family. Would Renaldo be allowed to shave? Trim his chest hair? Tweeze his eyebrows? Between the RZA’s mumblemouth delivery and the fact that this prophecy was evidently a hybrid of the Bible’s story of Samson and Delilah and Islamic texts that mandated the growth of men’s beards, it was nearly impossible to determine what Balkman should be doing with his prodigious body hair.

Because of these uncertainties, the Balkmans contacted various scholars for their interpretations of the prophecy. As they travelled from continent to continent they encountered the same question: “Really? You think your son is the next great New York City hustle player? He can’t even shoot or do anything that screams ‘basketball.’ Seems fishy to me.” Literally the same question was asked of every scholar the Balkmans spoke with. ‘Twas a tedious process, but one that would pay dividends later on.

After years of debate, it was decided that Balkman should maintain the hair on his head, and that all other body hair was ripe for trimming. Furthermore, the scholars agreed that Balkman would only succeed in his quest for NBA-hood if he were to be deemed worthy by a man of power who did not know how to handle his power. When Isiah Thomas drafted Renaldo Balkman, RZA’s prophecy was proven true.

Unfortunately for all involved, the second verse of the song fortold the consequences of this prophecy coming true. Most notably was the complete destruction of the New York basketball franchise. As you already know, that came true as well.
CARON BUTLER

Following Michael Vick’s arrest for dog fighting in April of 2007, many professional athletes used their platform to speak out against this heinous crime. In the NBA, players such as Lamar Odom and Michael Sweetney gave up eating chocolate until Vick was sent to jail. Ron Artest began his controversial “Dogs Are People Too” program. Some, like Chris Bosh, even grew their hair out in honor of their favorite dogs.

The tributes and protests were numerous, and each was touching in its own way. But one player couldn’t speak out. While that may have earned him his fair share of scorn, the reasons behind Caron Butler’s silence are valid.

In no way did Caron Butler support Vick’s actions, but for him, the topic of dog fighting is a complicated issue. On one hand, the savage destruction of living creatures is a horrifying catastrophe. On the other, Caron Butler hates dogs. Not in a “Let’s fight these things to the death” way, but in a “Why don’t you chill out, dogs?” way. For that reason, Caron Butler could not speak out against his former friend.

However, while he couldn’t bring himself to support the dogs’ rights activist, he did help in his own way. He made cat toys.

Yes, Caron Butler loves cats. He loves the way they smell, and how they purr when cuddled next to you. He’s fascinated by their mercurial nature and the way they paw at your face when you’re trying to sleep, just because they want to be petted. He doesn’t even mind the fact that a cat will eat your decaying corpse (he chalks this up to their survival instincts). Everything there is to love about cats, Caron Butler loves it. As such, with his great wealth and sympathy for every animal that isn’t a dog, he decided to become America’s premier cat toy designer.

Stores across the country unknowingly sell Butler’s high-end cat toys. Refusing to start his own company for fear of humiliation, Butler prefers to freelance for already established toymakers. His designs have fetched upward of $550,000, all of which has been donated to various charities. And though Butler is certainly proud of his successful foray in to cat toy designs, he remains humble. After all, not only is he helping cats, he’s not helping dogs. What better reward could a dog-hater ask for?
MIKE DUNLEAVY JR.

Mike Dunleavy is the son of Los Angeles Clippers head coach Mike Dunleavy Sr. Everyone knows that because they have the same name, basically. But what most people do not know is that he is also the nephew and godson of noted fashion designer Marc Jacobs. They don’t have the same names at all, so it is pretty easy to miss that important bit of information.

That is too bad, really, as Dunleavy’s persona is equally defined by basketball and fashion. Looking at Mike Dunleavy, Jr. you wouldn’t believe it, but he is very concerned with how he looks. That “weird guy with a hangy face” look is a choice.

Since Dunleavy was raised in a household that valued both hard work and creativity, the intersection of sports and culture was very important to the family. If it wasn’t basketball, then it was hours spent sewing in a downstairs design studio. If he wasn’t practicing free throws, Mike, Jr. was expected to be working on his pattern-making. As his father was busy with travelling, the dual pursuits of hoops and haute couture kept Mike out of trouble. And it turned out to be pretty cool, despite what all the kids called him at school.

Because of his dedication to both basketball and clothes, it has been said that the Dunleavy is instrumental in the explosion of sports fashion into streetwear. As his dad was an NBA coach, he got exclusive sneakers months before even the coolest of cool kids, so it makes sense that he would be the first to wear limited edition shoes with tight jeans. That is just one of the many trends that Mike Dunleavy, Jr. started.

But fashion is a double-edged sword, supposedly. So while Dunleavy’s trends became more and more ingrained in the public consciousness, he became more and more disillusioned with fashion at-large. Because of this, Dunleavy Jr. has turned his back on the couture world and is now strictly anti-fashion. When off the court, he can often be found sporting one of two sack-like outfits, either made from burlap or corduroy. It was a drastic stance that hasn’t really caught on, kind of like how he decided to sign a large contract then not be good at basketball. While that might make Dunleavy, Jr. pretty happy, not a lot of people share his sentiments.
KEVIN DURANT

Coming out of the University of Texas in the 2007 NBA draft, Kevin Durant was hailed as the second coming of something, or the first coming of Kevin Durant. The only knock on Durant was his size. Weighing only 115 pounds, Durant was put on a strict diet plan by team dieticians. The centerpiece of the plan was chicken tetrazolli. The recipe is printed in its entirety below.

**Chicken Tetrazolli**

1 whole chicken (no bones)
1 whole turkey (with bones)
1 tub Kaukauna spreadable port wine cheese
18 cups sugar
1 giant bag of Japanese breadcrumbs
½ pound russet potatoes, diced
1 celery stock
1 large bag mozzarella cheese
1 teaspoon almond extract

Pre-heat oven to 540 degrees Fahrenheit. Place turkey, breast down, in large roasting pan. Place in oven.

While the turkey is heating, coat shallow frying pan in cheese. Put chicken, breast up on top of cheesy frying pan. After 10 minutes of turkey roasting, place chicken/cheese pan above turkey pan in oven.

Once the cheese has bubbled over the chicken and dripped in to the turkey pan, remove turkey pan from oven. Discard turkey, retaining turkey/chicken/cheese mixture. Spread mixture over chicken. Add sugar in concentric circles around chicken carcass. Flip chicken.

After sugar has melted, rub it on the chicken, covering the turkey juice mixture. Add breadcrumbs, ensuring that all of the chicken is covered. No chicken flesh should be seen.

Once breadcrumbs have crisped, cover in mozzarella cheese. Return to oven.

After the cheese has melted, bread celery stalk in to eight pieces and build a mini-Stonehenge using cheese as support. Add almond extract to the muck that has formed at the bottom of the pan.

Cook for 25 minutes. Remove from oven. Serve warm with M&Ms.
DANILO GALLINARI

Raised in Italy by a basketball-playing father, Gallinari soon turned to the streets, as many Italian youths do. The son of a poor noodle-making mother and a artisanal bread-selling father, Gallinari came from virtually zero money. However, his street smarts, coupled with his parents’ ability to produce amazing cultural delicacies soon put the Gallinaris in a position of power throughout Italy.

In fact, local legend holds that the Gallinaris’ rise was meteoric. Considering Galileo Galilei was an Italian, it is obvious that the local legend-tellers know what they are talking about, so fuhgeddaboudit. However, as is usually the case when an Italian family makes a name for itself in Italy, the local mob boss soon catches wind.

As was expected by the Gallinaris, feared Mafia boss Don Fannuci soon took notice and demanded to “wet his beak,” and get a piece of the profits that Danilo, his family and his friends had been enjoying for some time now. It was inevitable, but still frustrating for a fellow trying to make his way in the highly-competitive delicious food industry.

Outraged that this big fat guy would try to take some of his and his family’s food money, Gallinari assured his parents and compatriots that they would pay the money and that Gallinari himself would talk to the Don. For whatever reason, the Gallinaris and Danilo’s friends, Tessio and Clemenza, assumed that this would not end in violence as Danilo had always been an even-tempered, stand-up guy and not some guy who would later go on to star in Raging Bull and Meet the Fockers.

What his partners did not know was that Danilo planned to assassinate their fearsome foe, because, apparently, they were not big fans of sequels. After successfully shooting the Don in his apartment building, Gallinari fled Italy for New York where he helped to establish the profitable pasta-importing business that Pizza Hut now calls their Tuscani line of pastas.

Soon there after, Gallinari became a member of the New York Knicks as their coach, Mike D’Antoni, owed a favor to Danilo’s father who was his former teammate. Having heard of Danilo’s ruthless pasta-negotiating techniques, D’Antoni made Gallinari the 6th pick in the 2008 draft despite Gallinari’s reputation as both a mafia boss and one of the best actors of his generation.
Upon arriving in the magical mystical land of Memphis, most people are perplexed by the preposterously prominent preponderance with that most delicious dairy delight -- cheese. Memphis is considered the Wisconsin of the South, mostly for its dedication to cheese artifacts, museums, and other cheesy knick-knacks. Where Wisconsin has its Mars Cheese Castle, Memphis has the Jupiter Cheese Hut. Memphis claims to offer two and a half gallons per person, the highest ratio of any city outside of Wisconsin. Because of this dedication to cheese, locals call Memphis “Little Sconnie,” though the name is never uttered around carpetbagging Northerners. As such, Rudy Gay was none the wiser.

That changed quickly, of course. Like all newcomers to the city, Gay was given a care package called the Memphis Special. While most would believe that this gift would contain a myriad of barbecue sauces, smoked meats, and possibly a handgun, in actuality the Memphis Special is composed entirely of cheese, even the basket itself, and its “Easter grass” are made of cheese. (Memphians have been ashamed of their BBQ and guns reputation for a while, and have since overcompensated in their attempts to shake the negative connotations.) In the cheese basket was a wheel of cheddar cheese, a block of Colby Jack cheese, and a life-size bust of Rudy himself carved from mozzarella. Not expecting a gift of this generosity or creepiness upon arrival, Gay was positively stunned. What he would find out next was even more shocking.

Knowing that he’d be in Memphis the league mandated five years, Gay decided to buy a house. Young millionaire that he is, Rudy demanded to see the best that the Memphis market had to offer. No, the houses were not made of cheese (Memphians had tried, but the oppressive mid-summer heat melted their roofs), but each did feature a feature present only in Memphis, the cheese dungeon.

At first Rudy Gay thought it weird that a house would need such a large storage unit just for cheese, but as he followed the first home’s underground tunnel he uncovered a vast subterranean network of interconnected cheese humidors that crisscrossed throughout the Central Gardens neighborhood. A little confused, and a lot scared, Gay weighed his options. On one hand, he could walk away from basketball and the Memphis cheese society forever. On the other, he’d be giving up a chance to play basketball for a living.

Rudy Gay still hasn’t gotten used to sharing his collection of cheeses.
DANNY GRANGER

Bugs are gross. We can all agree on this, right? About the bugs being gross. That's what we're agreeing on. OK, fine, entomologists. You can like bugs or study bugs or whatever it is you do, but the rest of us are agreeing that bugs are gross and/or creepy. Probably both.

Since we've agreed that bugs are gross/creepy/both, let's further agree that a collection of bugs would also be gross. Most likely grosser, since the number of bugs is increasing (that's what a collection is). And finally, the person doing the collecting of the collection of bugs would be the grossest, since they are the ones that decided gathering a bunch of gross bugs together would be a grand idea. They are the grossest. The most gross. Our ranking system, from gross to grossest:

1. Bugs
2. A collection of bugs
3. A person who collects bugs

Bad news, fans of Danny Granger. He collects bugs. Oh, does he collect bugs (yes, he does). Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head (“hakuna matata”). Danny Granger's bug collection is so large (and gross) that he's trying to build a “bat cave” under his house to store his large collection of gross bugs. Don't believe the media story that he just wanted something different, or that he identifies with Bruce Wayne because his parents were murdered after the opera by a hoodlum with an extraordinarily long-muzzled gun (they probably weren't). The pure and simple fact is that Danny Granger needs somewhere to keep his horrifying collection of gross bugs.

It started as a kid, when he used to delight in smashing flies with flyswatters. While this endeared him to his teachers and mother because it kept the house clean, it soon became creepy when he started tacking the fly corpses to the wall behind his bed. Soon, Granger's fly corpse collection numbered in the low 10,000s, which is way too many flies to consider.

He still has those flies, but they're no longer above his childhood bed. Now he keeps all of his kills in a sequential array of shoeboxes stuffed with fly corpses. He meticulously notes each and every killed fly, rating its explosion from one to 10. Naturally, flies led to other insects. There was the “Summer of the Millipede” near his Louisiana home. In just three months, Danny killed nearly 450,000 millipedes, searching night and day for his next victim. Many similar phases followed. All boxed, all documented. If you don't think that's gross, maybe you should build your own bat cave, creepo.
ANDRE IGUODALA

Growing up in Illinois' capital (Springfield), young Andre Iguodala soon became a local celebrity for his unmatched feats of strength. And as anyone who has spent more than seven minutes of time in Central and Southern Illinois knows, feats of strength are some of the most important feats in all of the Midwest. These feats are not messing around, to coin a phrase that will never be used again. Thought Iguodala never mastered human flight as was prophesized, he did do some amazing things that were definitely amazing.

By the age of 6, Iguodala was the city champion of a local taco-eating competition, devouring 26-and-three-quarters tacos in a single 15-minute sitting. And unlike most taco-eating championships, Iguodala's victory was not horchata aided.

When he was 14, he was already considered the city's best croquet player and captained his middle school's backgammon team. (This was also during the time when he was often wore ribbon belts and wooden clogs to school in an attempt to skew more European amongst his freshman friends. It was a weird time.)

These significant successes behind him — this is Central Illinois, after all — Iguodala turned his focus toward basketball, where he was equally successful. Legend has it that Iguodala promised himself and his family 20 years of basketball, after which would dedicate his life to his final triumph — assembling Earth's greatest collection of Lincoln Logs, a nod to his hometown's most famous inhabitant.

Currently 26 years old, Iguodala has only nine more years of basketball left before he will whole-heartedly devote himself to his Lincoln Log collection. As such, many teams who pursue him throughout his career must be aware that they will only employ Iguodala until precisely January 28, 2019 when he will immediately retire from basketball. Rumor has it that if whatever team that he plays for happens to be playing a west coast game, he will remove himself from the game if it goes past midnight Central time, as that is what timezone his impossibly accurate biological clock is accustomed to. Every team in the NBA has been alerted to this possibility, and it will be interesting to see how teams handle him later in his career.

Furthermore, Andre Iguodala has never smiled — not even a single tooth-bearing smirk — in his entire life. Some wonder if this is also a wager he made with himself. Only time will tell.
LEBRON JAMES

In his quest to become a global icon, LeBron James has used his nearly unlimited resources to ensure his longevity and ascendance. And while he is not yet the first billionaire athlete, his vast resources are indeed pretty vast. They are so vast in fact, that their vastness cannot be fully articulated by lower case letters. That being the case, it is safe to say that James’s resources are VAST. It is with these VAST resources that James has acquired numerous technologies that will allow him to conquer Earth. In fact, James has founded a company called Variegated Advanced Scientific Technologies (V.A.S.T.) that specializes in time travel, space exploration and robotics. Through this company, James has set in place events that will ensure his prominence in basketball for years to come.

James’s primary reason for creating V.A.S.T. was to establish some means of time traveling. Through careful research and consultation, it was determined that the safest and most efficient mode of transportation was a tiny device which could be implanted in humans. After testing, LeBron used this device to travel to the future. Upon arriving in the year 2029, LeBron was crushed. Not literally, but emotionally. While in the future, LeBron found that he had suffered horrific injuries to each of his legs, the result of jumping too high, too often. While there, he also discovered that because of these injuries, it was Kobe Bryant (see page 26) and not LeBron who was considered the finest player of his generation. Upon returning to 2007, LeBron was determined to change these circumstances.

Back in 2006, LeBron tasked his scientists with creating an indestructible endoskeleton that would grant him unmatched health, but still be light enough for LeBron’s high-flying maneuvers. After two years of research, V.A.S.T. representatives travelled back to 1989, where they funded Operation Hawkeye, which would allow for the insertion of this endoskeleton into Tim Duncan (see page 76). In 2006, the researchers realized that they had been more successful than they had imagined, as Tim Duncan had won four championships and was considered the greatest ever at his position. Plans were hastily made to implant James with a similar endoskeleton.

Now indestructible, LeBron instructed V.A.S.T. representatives to approach Kobe Bryant to use their time-traveling device. Since LeBron and V.A.S.T. had already experienced their past, they knew that Bryant teaching Michael Jordan Jordan’s own moves would create a scenario in which Bryant was considered an imitation. Unbeknownst to Bryant, his attempt at rewriting history was already preordained. Not only had he taught the man to whom he would always fail to measure up, he also had cheapened his own legacy, one that LeBron James had now started to eclipse.

And they say money can’t buy happiness.
STEPHEN JACKSON

This reading book that you are reading is chock-full of stories so far-fetched that it is not a terrible stretch of the imagination to lobby charges of fabrication at the handsome author. Tales of wizards and warlocks, robots and cyborgs, and of course a multi-national conglomerate concerned only with the advancement of a single sensational player may seem like the fanciful work of a crazed genius, but they are reality. The following story, however, has been widely disseminated as a cautionary tale, and the NBA’s head honchos have even gone so far as to produce a fake video, purporting to be the events in question. Please read the following account carefully and draw your own conclusions.

On November 19th, 2004, the Indiana Pacers and Detroit Pistons faced off in a highly anticipated bout. The two Eastern Conference foes were seen as the favorites in their divisions, and most felt that one of these two teams would reach the NBA Finals. The game progressed beautifully, and the Pacers held a 15 point lead with 45.9 seconds left. This much we know is true. What follows are where things get a little fishy.

Allegedly, Indiana’s Ron Artest fouled Detroit’s Ben Wallace in the back. Supposedly, a pushing match ensued, which left Artest lying on the scorer’s table, trying to defuse the situation. Then, supposedly, some bro threw a beer on to Ron Artest, causing the normally even-tempered swingman to charge in to the stands seeking vengeance. Naturally, it was alleged that teammate Stephen Jackson followed him, leading to an out and out brawl.

Knowing that both Artest and Jackson are perfectly even-keeled, the likelihood of this alleged melee seems highly suspicious. Artest’s exemplary behavior has been well chronicled, so it seems prudent that we fully exonerate him from this nasty conspiracy. Jackson, likewise, was clearly framed.

Just because he got hit by a car, then fired a gun, while at a strip club, doesn’t make it right that he should be digitally inserted in to a falsified video and considered “insane.” Just because he has been charged with at least one felony and several misdemeanors does not mean the NBA should subject him to a smear campaign. Just because he used to wear his headband like a yarmulke doesn’t mean he should be treated any differently.

So please, remember that Stephen Jackson is just like any one of us: a normal guy, with some bad people trying to hurt him. Please seek the truth.

This chapter paid for by the Stephen Jackson Committee for Equality.
ANDREI KIRILENKO

The 1994 motion picture *Andre* was a smash hit, instantly becoming the most important and most highly regarded movie ever made in the “human befriending a seal” genre. In the film, a 9-year old girl (Toni, played by Tina Majorino) forms a close bond with an orphaned seal named Andre. While this in and of itself may not be particularly stunning, since this sort of thing happens every day, the ensuing antics are anything but commonplace. Andre and Toni become best of friends, but the local fishermen tire of Andre’s silliness. Only Toni’s love for Andre can save him as the fishermen become more and more angry. This too isn’t any big surprise, as children and seals are famously friendly, but the true story behind this spectacular movie is quite stunning.

Born in Izhevsk (pronounced “Izhevsk”) but raised in Saint Petersburg, Andrei Kirilenko’s childhood was typically Russian. Days were spent in ballet training, while evenings were spent digesting the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. For his 5th birthday, per Bolshevik rule, Kirilenko was given his own personal seal, which he subsequently named Toni (pronounced “Tony”). Like most Russians do with their state-sponsored aquatic creatures, Andrei and Toni became fast friends.

Soon, the pair was inseparable. Andrei would bring Toni with him everywhere, as this is the definition of inseparable. Whether it be to the corner store for some shaslyk (pronounced “shlkerlk”) or to the local perestroika warehouse, Toni accompanied Andrei. Naturally, Andrei was sure to wheel along a 55-gallon barrel filled with saltwater to ensure Toni’s survival. And though this was certainly inconvenient, Andrei made sure to keep the barrel with him at all times, just to keep his good friend from dying of asphyxiation, a small price to pay for companionship.

It was Andrei’s 10th birthday when the pair sat for the making of their first set of Matryoshka (pronounced “nesting”) dolls. Out of deference to his sea-bound comrade, Kirilenko elected to arrange the dolls in this manner: Toni with a smaller Andrei inside with a smaller Toni inside with a smaller Andrei inside with the smallest Toni inside. This was an unorthodox arrangement since Toni belonged to Andrei, and the seal did not take it well.

When Andrei presented Toni with the completed set of dolls, Toni flipped out, literally. Angrily flopping about, Toni destroyed the insides of one of Russia’s most famous landmarks, Matryoshka Mart. The seal even refused to accept Andrei’s watering, leading to his horrifying death, ironically after eating the last four dolls. These events would be fictionalized just four years later (with names changed to protect the principals’ identities) in the masterpiece of movie-making *Andre*. 
SHAWN MARION

Back when he attended Vincennes University, Shawn Marion was a cat owner. It was a beautiful, multi-colored cat named Steve. When Shawn would describe to Steve to his friends, he liked to say she had a kitten head with a raccoon’s body. It goes without saying, but will be said anyways, that Steve was an unmistakable cat. She wasn’t going to be confused with your typical tabby down the street, that’s for sure. But as most people know, Vincennes, Indiana is the cat capitol of North America. So when Shawn was comparing Steve to the neighborhood cats, he had a lot of comparisons to make. And that’s how the most terrifying day of Shawn Marion’s life began.

It was a Tuesday, or possibly a Wednesday, no one can be sure. All Shawn Marion knew was that it was a weekday, which meant he had basketball practice. Trailblazer practices were known for two things. First, Coach Dave Sparks’ fencing fetish. Second, a commitment to punctuality. You did not want to be late, lest these two hallmarks of Trailblazer basketball intercede. Not a pleasant visual, and an even worse actuality. Shawn Marion knew this. Steve did not.

On that fateful Tuesday or Wednesday, Steve had other plans. After her usual day of lying on the floor, stretching, and lying on the desk, Steve decided to take a little adventure. Like Shawn, Steve was a darter. Whereas Shawn would quickly appear for an alley-oop, Steve would try to run outside any time a door was opened. Virtually the same thing, and on this Tuesday or Wednesday, quite the predicament for Shawn Marion. For on that day, Steve made her finest dart to date.

He left the door open for just a second. Literally. He was so quick to open and close the door, and so cognizant of that necessity, that he would do his best to escape his own house. But on that day, Steve was quicker.

Once he saw her make her move, Shawn quickly went in to pack-leader mode, searching the neighborhood for Steve. Every so often, he’d catch a glimpse of Steve darting from under an adjacent deck to up a tree. He’d quickly follow, but he knew this wasn’t going to be a five-minute adventure. Hoping to save himself from Coach Sparks’ foil, he ran to his living room to email his coach, wanting to document what had happened and why he was going to be late.

That’s when he saw her sitting on the sofa. Calm as ever, Steve let out a tiny purr, as if to taunt Shawn for his futile search. Exasperated, but thankful she was alive, Shawn finished his email, knowing that he’d soon feel that familiar stabbing that Coach Sparks was so fond of.
TRACY MCGRADY

Elephant Leg Syndrome is a disease that affects upwards on 12 people globally each year. That number may seem low, but please remember that any number higher than zero in this case means that there are humans roaming the Earth that have at least one elephant leg where their normal human leg should be. We can all agree than no human should have an elephant leg, because of how terrifying an encounter with an elephant legged human would be. If you doubt this, please Google “elephant leg syndrome.” It's horrible.

Even more horrible is the effect that this elephant leg has on the afflicted. While it may cause us to lose our lunch at the mere sight of it, just imagine waking up one morning with a leg five times its normal size, plus at the end, a hoof-like structure. Pretty wack. As for athleticism, think again. How many elephants have you seen in the NBA? Exactly.

But imagine for a moment that a player made it to the NBA, only to be stricken with Elephant Leg Syndrome. Though it was quite unfathomable, the stars aligned, and the oft-injured Tracy McGrady developed this sickening condition.

It occurred in March of 2006 during McGrady’s ninth season, and it was a harbinger of things to come. One evening, during a game against the Indiana Pacers, McGrady felt his leg tighten up. Used to these strange injuries, McGrady thought nothing of it. But after the game it kept getting tighter and tighter. That's when he finally looked down. Much to his disgust, McGrady’s leg was now basically the same size and shape as a mature oak tree. When he touched the hard, thick mass of leg, he immediately passed out. He didn’t wake until the morning.

When he finally awoke, the effects of Elephant Leg Syndrome were even more pronounced. In his unconsciousness, McGrady’s leg continued to expand, eventually tearing through the expensive dress pants that he had been wearing. Now nearly six feet in circumference, McGrady alerted Rockets team doctors to his hideous appendage.

Wanting to preserve some value for McGrady, the doctors called it a back injury, saying that McGrady fell on his back weird. The truth was that the leg required immediate surgery. Unfortunately, the gigantic, malodorous leg horrified the surgeons so much that they refused to operate. Instead, McGrady was given an ointment that alleviated some of the putrid smell. When they could finally stand to be in the room with the leg, the doctors went to work. They removed all swelling and the tiny bits of ivory that had grown from the leg.

Soon, McGrady’s leg was healed. However, much of his agility and explosiveness had been sapped in the operation, a side effect that has been all too apparent in the time since this mysterious happening.
ADAM MORRISON

At tiny Gonzaga University, Adam Morrison became immensely famous for three things. First was his ability to shoot a basketball over defenders, a skill that would be wholly irrelevant in the NBA. Next, crying during his final game, for the ladies. Last, but not least, his barely-there mustache. And though his mustache fast became his trademark, most people are unaware of the nearly tragic circumstances through which he came to wear it.

Growing up in Glendive, Montana, home of America’s finest organically grown celery, Morrison was just like any other basketball-crazed teenager. Day after day, he’d show up early to school to shoot around, sometimes arriving as much as four hours prior to classes beginning. Of course, after school brought more basketball — practice followed by another two hours of shooting drills. But it was after that that Morrison really came alive. On the mean streets of Glendive, Morrison was a legend in the burgeoning street racing scene.

As is the case with most teenagers, getting his driver’s license fascinated Morrison. Finally, this clean-shaven gentleman could squire the finest Montanan ladies about town. After buying blouses for numerous women, Morrison would head to the quarter-mile track just outside of town. There, in his souped-up ‘88 Camry, Morrison would race until the wee hours of the morning, swindling suckers out of their hard-earned money. Naturally, Morrison spent this money on additional souping for his car, and then blouses for his quite accepting girlfriends.

When the Glendive scene became too small for Morrison, after he’d dominated the locals in the so-called Montana Motoring Tour, he declared his interest in Race Wars, the West Coast’s biggest illegal street racing circuit. Rather than squandering his money on blouses and additional spoilers, Morrison saved his money until he had enough to pay the entrance fee at Race Wars.

June 18, 2001 was the day Morrison had been looking forward to seemingly his entire life. Morrison and his crew of bloused ladies traveled to the outskirts of Los Angeles, anxious to compete against the best in the world. And compete he did.

After winning three preliminary races, Morrison was entered into a race “for pinks” with street racing legends Johnny Tran, Paul Walker and Vin Diesel. Everything seemed to be going fine — until Morrison’s head gasket cracked. Since his ‘88 Camry was so finely tuned, this malfunction caused Morrison to lose control and flip his car. (These events would later be portrayed in the 2001 documentary The Fast and the Furious.)

The flip left Morrison’s car destroyed. Even worse, Morrison suffered a deep gash to his upper lip, which he has subsequently covered (mostly) with his mustache. Though Morrison has vowed to never drive again, he has similarly vowed to never shave again, his mustache serving as a reminder of how fragile life really is.
PAUL PIERCE

Sometimes NBA players get fat. For example, Shawn Kemp, Michael Sweetney and Eddy Curry are all fat guys who have played in the NBA. Everyone has their favorite fat guy, though most are partial to Oliver Miller, a man known more for his extreme fatness than his freakishly long arms. However, Boston Celtics fans all have the same favorite fat guy and it isn’t Antoine Walker. He’s second.

No, the favorite fat guy of any Boston Celtics fan isn’t terribly fat — certainly not in the Curry/Miller/Sweetney strata. Rather, it’s a guy who is deceptively fat, who used to look slim and agile, but is now quite doughy. If you haven’t guessed by now, go to the top of the page. It’s Paul Pierce.

Unlike those other fat guys, Paul Pierce’s fatness isn’t a hindrance. In fact, he uses his added girth to push around smaller players. It has also been of great advantage to his offensive attack. Now when a defensive player sizes up Pierce, they assume that, because he’s chunky, he won’t be able to blow by him. Usually they’re wrong.

“But how did he get so tubby?” you’re wondering. The answer, as it usually is, is fried foods.

After receiving a multimillion-dollar contract extension in 2002 to remain a Boston Celtic, Pierce decided that he deserved to splurge. Not wanting to be a cliché, Pierce ignored cars, houses and jewelry (though this can partially be attributed to his stabbing in 2000). Instead, he went for practical luxury, purchasing a top-of-the-line deep fryer called the Fry and Feed XLK.

Since then, Pierce has devoted himself to the art of fried food. Starting out with staples such as French fries, chicken fingers and the occasional dough ball, he soon branched out to the innovations of the Deep South. Whether it is fried Twinkies, Snickers or Oreos, Pierce studied the ins and outs of frying these delicate foods. It was only natural that he would progress on to his own creations.

In the summer of 2007, Pierce attempted what would become his signature. Slicing a stick of unsalted butter in half and breading it with a beer batter, Pierce gently dipped the fragile mixture in to the hot oil. After just 15 seconds, Pierce’s treat was ready, save for a quick dash of powdered sugar.

The taste was indescribable. Crispy yet gooey; salty, sweet and buttery (obviously). Pierce had triumphed. Soon he shopped his invention to every state fair south of the Mason-Dixon Line. In the summer of 2009, every state fair in America had adopted his dish, calling it “Fried PP,” both for its inventor and its color. While his heart might disagree, an innovation like that is worth the gut.
JR SMITH

Following Thomas Edison’s death in October 1931, the formal title “The Wizard of Menlo Park” was retired in honor of the great inventor. Edison had been awarded the distinction for his introduction of the phonograph, and following the ceremony the former Wizard left for Cherry Hill, where he would die a few years later. All of this is discussed beautifully in John Hodgman’s “More Information Than You Require,” should the reader choose to follow-up on the background of this amazing story. But that is the distant past, and what this book is concerned with is the more recent past. And in this particular situation, the modern history of “The Wizard of Menlo Park.”

A mere 25 miles south of Menlo Park, Earl Smith III was born in Freehold, New Jersey. Home to such entertainment luminaries as Bruce Springsteen and his significantly less famous second cousin Brice Springstein, Earl Smith III began learning the ostentatious showmanship native to the area at a young age. Also as a youth, Earl began noticing strange occurrences, things too strange to be explained by natural means.

Oftentimes Earl would be seated around the dinner table with his parents, Earl Jr. and Ida, and a glass would break without any actions by anyone around the table. Other times, items would disappear almost instantly, only to reappear exactly 24 hours later, upside down. At age 17, when these happenings began happening more often, Smith received an electronic mail message beckoning him to Menlo Park for examinations.

Upon arriving at the provided address, a signless storefront, Smith reluctantly entered what turned out to be the Wizarding Institution of Menlo Park. Inside, a single plainclothes gentleman approached Smith and wordlessly ran his hands over Smith’s face. This decrepit, haggard old man continued to stroke the crevasses and bumps of Smith’s face for nearly an hour before he finally spoke the words he had wanted to say for so long — “My heir … the Wizard of Menlo Park” — before crumpling to the ground and disappearing.

Smith searched through the man’s clothes, hoping to find out what had just happened. In the rank, crusty, heavily patinated pants that had been left behind, Earl found only two items. The first was a pocket watch with an engraving: “Thomas Edison — the Wizard of Menlo Park.” The other, a plain ecru piece of cardstock emblazoned with the letters JR.
JOSH SMITH

As we all know, the 2007 motion picture *Superbad* is the most successful documentary in the history of the movie industry. Bigger than *Hoop Dreams*. Bigger than *Grizzly Man*. Bigger, even, than the 2002 Rumspringa expose *Devil’s Playground*. In a 2008 Vanity Fair poll, *Superbad* was voted the Best Movie of All-Time, almost unanimously. The entire panel of well-connected Hollywood insiders (except Ashton Kutcher who voted for *The Butterfly Effect*) chose this documentary above all other films ever made. Lofty film. However, the Vanity Fair piece stirred up quite a bit of controversy, as competing periodical Variety quickly launched an investigation in to the survey. What they found was shocking.

Yes, it was true that the movie was about high school kids. Yes, it was the story of two best friends. Yes, it was the story of their eventful last night of summer. And yes, the faux-documentary style, popularized by Weezer’s 1995 video for their single “Say It Ain’t So,” gave the appearance of a documentary. But that wasn’t necessarily the truth. As you might have ascertained, the movie wasn’t actually a documentary, and it’s not totally about what it purports to be about. Rather, it is a fictionalized version of Josh Smith (Seth) and Dwight Howard (Evan).

It is common knowledge that Smith and Howard are best friends from way back. Both attended high school in Atlanta, and both played for the same AAU team, the Atlanta Celtics. The two supported each other throughout their increasingly hectic high school careers, becoming almost inseparable. Then the 2004 NBA Draft happened. As expected, Howard went first to the Orlando Magic. Smith, however, dropped to 17th, eventually being chosen by the hometown Hawks.

Naturally, Smith became jealous of his friend’s draft position, and his resulting rage lead to a splintering in their friendship. It was only after the more even-keeled Howard confessed his adoration for Smith that the pair was reunited.

As you can see, the events that transpired on draft night in 2004 are eerily similar to those of Seth and Evan in *Superbad*. While some events were embellished (or entirely made up – there was no police interaction), the basic story of the night was obviously appropriated by Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, the movie’s writers. Following Variety’s reporting, Smith and Howard filed a defamation of character suit against Rogen and Goldberg, and the subsequent trial featured testimonies from their friends who had been fictionalized in the movie (most notably from J.R. Smith, McLovin in *Superbad*). After six weeks of trial, the suit was settled out of court. As a result *Superbad* has been stripped of its Best Movie of All-Time title, Dwight Howard has leveraged the win into mass marketability, and Josh Smith finally got to kiss that cute redhead.
HEDO TURKOGLU

Syndactyly is a rare disease in humans, affecting just one in every 2,000 to 2,500 live births. For the non-scientifically inclined, syndactyly is a fancypants way of saying “webbed fingers or toes.” Though the actual name makes this affliction sound cute and stylish, anyone who has seen the results knows this to be untrue. Simply put, webbed fingers and/or toes are gross. If they weren’t, then they would not have been used as plot points in multiple science fiction movies.

Though rare, syndactyly is more prominent in certain areas around the globe. The people of Madagascar have long been known as the “fish people” for their fused hands and feet. In New Zealand, it is considered good fortune to have at least one of your digits attached to another. But nowhere is this syndrome more prevalent than in Gaziosmanpaşa, Turkey, home of Hidayet Turkoglu.

In his birthplace, Turkoglu is one of the nearly 100,000 residents (or one in 10 people) to suffer from syndactyly. And though not celebrated, syndactyly is accepted throughout the country. In fact, Turkoglu’s nickname “Hedo” is Turkish for “flat hand,” a reference to his disfigured left hand.

As a child, the hand caused Turkoglu no problems. Like many of his classmates, he quickly learned to compensate for the near-complete inflexibility by mastering most tasks with his right hand. But most of his classmates weren’t like Hedo.

By age 14, he was greater than 6 feet tall and took a liking to basketball, adapting his game to his flat hand. Unable to drive left with any sort of agility, Turkoglu developed a crossover where he would dribble softly from right to left, then slap the ball with all his might to return it to his right hand. This proved to be effective, as his fused hand developed almost superhuman power, allowing Turkoglu’s crossover to be low and hard, almost like a normal person’s.

Following his seventh season, with millions of dollars now in his pockets, Turkoglu was able to afford the surgery that he had dreamed of his entire life. In June 2007, the fibrous tissue connecting all four fingers and thumb on his left hand was severed, giving him almost complete control of the hand. Though he had built his game around the deformity, the added dexterity of a second hand improved Turkoglu’s skills so much that he was named Most Improved Player for the season. If you pay close attention, you can still see the remnants of his slap crossover in his new smooth handle. Old habits die hard, especially when they come from being horribly disfigured as a child.

It’s an old saying.
LAMARCUS ALDRIDGE

As a young boy, LaMarcus Aldridge acquired a copy of Will Smith’s debut rap album, *He’s the DJ, I’m the Rapper*, at a local secondhand music store. There are life-changing moments, and then there is LaMarcus Aldridge discovering Will Smith which can only be considered life-defining.

Instantly enamored with the playful rhymes and uptempo musical backing, Aldridge became an avid supporter of the future actor. No matter who it was — teachers, religious leaders, homeless men, et cetera — Aldridge would describe, in minute detail, the intricacies of Smith’s rhyme patterns, dance moves and everything connected to his persona.

When Smith’s television show, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, began in 1990, Aldridge was hooked, promising to himself that he would support any and all commercial output by the entertainer. Whether it be television, music or even a special line of cigars designed specifically for biting, Aldridge would have it. He would tell others he should have it. He would be it. Not in a creepy way, but in a supportive way.

So when Will Smith made the jump to the big screen, LaMarcus Aldridge was quite smitten. Once again, not in a creepy way. Just in a “YEAH WILL SMITH! YOU’RE THE BEST!” way, which is totally cool. And then, when LaMarcus Aldridge didn’t think he could be a bigger Will Smith fan, *Big Willie Style* was released. To this day, Aldridge considers its release date, November 25, 1997, to be the most important day in his life. He even has it tattooed on his eyelids, a “NOV” on his right eye and a “25” on his left.

Thinking he was the world’s biggest Smith fan, Aldridge was surprised to see the devotion to this legendary rapper in fellow NBA players Mehmet Okur and Chauncey Billups. As soon as he heard about the International Federation of Will Smith Fanatics, he joined and was immediately made comptroller, a position he holds to this day.

Though their little club hasn’t grown beyond the three of them, they remain active in the Will Smith community. They consider the work they do — rallies, in-depth Wikipedia edits, and physical confrontations with those besmirch Smith’s work — to be the most important in their lives, and each is on record as saying that any ill words by any NBA players would be reason for retirement and a class action lawsuit against the league. That’s dedication.
MICHAEL BEASLEY

Even before he arrived in the National Basketball Association, people knew Michael Beasley was a little different. He has been expelled from school for drawing on an administrator’s car. He attended at least six high schools. Flying a kite is probably his favorite activity. And of course, he chose to wear cornrows when basically all NBA players had traded in their braids for a more grown-up look. All in all, Michael Beasley certainly marches to the beat of his own drummer. And that drummer isn’t great at keeping a beat, and plays a lot of patterns that don’t really make sense, kind of like Meg White. Michael Beasley marches to the beat of Meg White’s drumming. Yes, that works.

However, probably the strangest thing about Michael Beasley is something that no one but his closest friends has witnessed: his obsession with female-oriented television programming. Like many middle-aged homemakers, Beasley is devoted to both the series of home and self-improvement shows that air on HGTV and TLC. Whether it is What Not to Wear or Designed to Sell, Beasley watches it all with great enthusiasm. Those closest to him consider it infuriating.

During the summers, Beasley has a viewing regimen that allows him to see every episode of every show on both networks. Due to his exorbitant bank account, he has purchased five digital video recorders, each with 100 hours of recording time. On two recorders, he programs shows starting at the top of the hour on either TLC or HGTV. Two more recorders are programmed to tape on the half-hour. The last is used for “recreational recording,” as Beasley calls it.

Each day, he settles upon a recorder and watches every episode that has been taped, including reruns. The next day, he switches to the second recorder, and so on and so forth. This setup ensures that he always has something to watch, and that he’ll never lack for home improvement ideas. Beasley rarely uses the “recreational recorder,” which is typically filled with weight-loss programs.

Many would assume that Beasley would put these shows to good use and do remodeling of his and his friends’ houses, but they’d be wrong. Rather, Beasley hoards this information, refusing to share it with his closest acquaintances. His given reason for keeping this information to himself is the book that he is supposedly writing Michael Beasley’s Big Book of House-Fixing Tips. Though no one knows how far along the book is, or if it even exists, most are sure that there will be absolutely zero publisher interest, considering that Michael Beasley has never written a book. And also because he does not know how to do anything regarding home improvements.
CARLOS BOOZER

The laws of attraction are quite strange. For one, there aren’t actually any laws, since any government would be ridiculous to actually sign these proposed bills into law. Furthermore, there is no way to know what works on different people. For proof, look at Counting Crows frontman Adam Duritz, who has dated beautiful, famous women while being a Jewish fellow with dreadlocks. And since these fake laws are so impossibly unpredictable, it is not uncommon that a person would try whatever they can to attract the opposite sex. Take, for example, Carlos Boozer.

Boozer is not your typical lothario. First, you’ll notice that Carlos Boozer stands 6 feet 9 inches tall and weighs nearly 270 pounds, an imposing figure for any woman. The next thing you can’t miss is the abundance of body hair that defines Boozer. Whether it is his formidable unibrow, excessive chest pelt or underarm bushels, Boozer’s bear-like hairiness does not fit in with the commonly held notions of handsomeness. And that hirsuteness requires a meticulous devotion to personal hygiene, a set of rituals that Carlos Boozer joyously ignores. In whole, Carlos Boozer is a large, hairy, smelly man. However, he also possesses a skill that is nearly unparalleled among professional basketball players.

While Boozer is not the archetypal male, he does possess a legendary touch on a sewing machine. His blouses are considered amongst the finest in the world, rivaling those produced by France’s most extravagant couturiers. These blouses, which are not commercially available, are flawless. Boozer has constructed peasant tops, boatneck shirts and ruched tees along with other trendy designs for the women he desires.

Boozer’s primary method of seduction is to find an attractive woman at a Jazz game (no easy feat), obtain her telephone number through teammate Kyle Korver and then proceed to design the blouse. After purchasing the fabrics, designing the garment and finally constructing it, he will call the woman, instructing her to meet him at a neutral location. Upon her arrival, Boozer presents the woman with her personalized blouse. It is then that Boozer cordially offers that he’d love a new muse.

The women are instantly hooked. Though he can only produce about a garment a month during the season, that rate increases to one blouse per week in the summer. By the time a relationship has ended, the woman has a new one-of-a-kind wardrobe that the best-dressed celebrities in the world would envy. Boozer has used these techniques to lure such beauties as Megan Fox, Phoebe Cates and Hilary Swank. This craftiness, in all senses of the word, can be seen in the stands, on the back of his latest fling and on the court, where Boozer’s brainy, brawny game thrives.
CHRIS BOSH

The motion picture *Mortal Kombat* was a formative influence for many people of a certain age. After the success of the video game of the same name, a group of martial arts experts organized a tournament pitting warrior against warrior, all under the watchful eye of Albert Maysles’s camera. Upon its release, the documentary revolutionized training methods across the globe. One youngster who took notice was Chris Bosh. Amazed by the wizard Shang Tsung's morphing capabilities, Bosh became obsessed with obtaining that same ability, swearing to anyone around his dedication. Soon enough, he would have his chance.

It was at the 2003 NBA Draft that Chris Bosh first met LeBron James (see page 54). Eight years after the release of *Mortal Kombat*, and still six years until the founding of Variegated Advanced Scientific Technologies, this was a meeting that would have profound implications on the world at large. Though it had lay dormant for years, Bosh hadn’t yet given up the dream of being able to morph. While no significant discoveries in this field had been made, Bosh still believed that someday he would be able to inhabit the powers of his idols in some way, shape, or form. Little did he know that he had met the man who would make that happen.

James admired Bosh’s candor. As one lanky teenager told another how he wanted to become another person, James knew he had found a powerful accomplice. Four years later, in the summer of 2007, James offered Bosh a chance to live his dream. In exchange for his complete devotion to the cause of advanced basketball technologies, Bosh would have installed in him a chip and endoskeleton that would give him the ability to mimic anyone who he could obtain a DNA sample from. Bosh jumped at the opportunity.

Soon he was pinching, poking, and pulling anyone who he admired. The fiery intensity of Kevin Garnett met with the reptilian nature of Marquis Daniels. The flowing dreadlocks of Lil’ Wayne joined with the inconsequential jaw line of Michael McDonald. Bosh was growing in to himself, while actually inhabiting the qualities of others.

Unfortunately for Bosh there was fine print he didn’t read. Yes, he knew that he owed his devotion to James and V.A.S.T., but he didn’t realize that this meant that at any time, this system could be disengaged. Prior to the 2008-09 season, James did just that, sapping Bosh of all the little, stolen things that had made him what he was. Bosh took a disheartening step back, and some believe this was done to decrease his market value, making the likelihood that he becomes a teammate of James in the future. Only time will tell...
ELTON BRAND

The NBA season lasts from the end of October until the middle of June. It is a long, laborious trudge filled with exhausting travel to every major city in America, exquisitely prepared meals and a per diem that would take a minimum wage worker hours to earn. Couple those circumstances with the fact that the players have to play basketball for sometimes three hours in a night, and it’s easy to see why many athletes suffer through the season. However, the nearly four months of vacation make it worthwhile.

Each player spends his vacation a different way. Popular pastimes include going on boats, buying cars and, sometimes, improving their games. But mostly, players use this time off as exactly that — time off (hence the saying). It’s their chance to relax and get away from the stress of playing in front of thousands of adoring fans each night. No one knows this better than Elton Brand.

Like many players, Brand likes to decompress following the rigors of his season. Also like many players, he soon becomes restless, leading to numerous business development opportunities. Unlike many players, though, Elton Brand has found a way to couple both relaxation and business, for his idea of relaxing is, in fact, business.

Following his Achilles injury (and subsequent deactivation) during the 2007-08 season, Elton Brand fell in love with the kitchen. Well, more specifically, he fell in love with the Food Network. While there are more than 500 channels available, there simply isn’t anything on but cooking shows. If you’ve ever stayed home sick from work, or attended a stand-up comedy show, you’re aware of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, Elton Brand was hooked.

After hours and hours spent devouring 30 Minute Meals, Brand soon acquired Rachael Ray’s numerous cookbooks and would surprise his wife Shahara each night with a different meal. Still living in Los Angeles at the time, Brand did what any Angeleno would do: he developed a television show.

Though still in its nascent stages, Making Food with Elton Brand has been greenlit by the Food Network. When many questioned his defection from the Clippers to the Philadelphia 76ers, television insiders knew the reason lay in the network’s home base location of Erie, Pennsylvania. A Duke graduate, Elton realized that his NBA days were numbered, and sought to capitalize on the opportunity that his fame and love of cooking afforded him. And that, folks, is a recipe for success.
TIM DUNCAN

Some of the most obvious truths are hidden in plain sight. Brandon Roy’s Sasquatch (page 38) hides in a residential forest. The spaceships that were captured during the Roswell invasion became statues in Brooklyn. There is a penis on the cover of The Little Mermaid. Our minds are so accustomed to seeing what we want to see that sometimes we can’t see what we should see. That’s a paradox, friends.

Another of these easily overlooked facts is the robot nature of Tim Duncan. Perhaps that is misleading, as a robot cannot be natural (another paradox), so I shall rephrase in clearer English: Tim Duncan is part robot. It’s true. What people have joked about so often that it has become a cliché is actually a carefully calculated experiment that the United States government decided would be too frightening for the general public.

It’s common knowledge that Tim Duncan was an Olympic-level swimmer as a teenager. Furthermore, many people know that Duncan stopped swimming after Hurricane Hugo destroyed the only Olympic-sized swimming pool in Duncan’s home country of Saint Croix. It was then that the government’s experimental robotics division stepped in.

Under the cover of Operation Hawkeye (the sending of troops to quell riots in Saint Croix), numerous inhabitants who had been injured during the hurricane were taken to ad-hoc facilities outside the town of Frederiksted. It was there that Duncan, among the injured, was fitted with an endoskeleton comprised of lightweight titanium and advanced robotic systems. Additionally, a supercomputer chip was implanted in to his frontal lobe, which would allow Duncan to perform advanced mathematics at a rate incomprehensible to humans. Unfortunately, the placement of this chip robbed Duncan of any sort of personality.

Since the project was highly secretive and likely illegal, Duncan was forced to keep quiet. As his body was now filled with millions of dollars worth of computer equipment and sensitive wiring, he would not be able to return to the water. This posed a problem, as Duncan had been in training for a spot on the United States team that would be competing in the Barcelona Olympics of 1992. Equipped with his supercomputer, Duncan quickly posited that he should say that he could not swim in the ocean (the only place big enough for proper training) because he was scared of sharks. Thus a cover story was formulated.

Duncan quickly mastered the hydraulics and nuances of his cyborg body. His ability to think at such a high level quickly led him to basketball. There, with his indestructible body and raw, savage mathematical power, he quickly became dominant, battling Alonzo Mourning to a duel at age 18. Since then, Duncan has kept his secret and turned this potentially horrifying disaster in to a thing of painstakingly boring beauty.
In the wake of the Michael Vick saga, a lot of professional athletes were worried that the care of their own animals would come under scrutiny. As we all know, Chipper Jones of the Atlanta Braves had to shut down his game hunting business, just to be careful. Bernard Berrian, wide receiver for the Minnesota Vikings, ceased his experiments of mating dogs with dolphins. It's common knowledge that even Wayne Gretzky decided against keeping a coyote as a symbolic pet. Needless to say, America's athletes were spooked. They couldn't afford the public relations and financial nightmares that Vick had gone through. Seemingly, no one was more devastated than Kevin Garnett.

Most of Garnett's apprehension owes to his hearing impairment. Years of yelling at teammates and opponents have left Garnett almost 75% deaf. In fact, what now appears to be yelling is really just Garnett conversing, as he can't hear anything uttered below the screaming threshold. Because of this disability, Garnett was terrified that his own dog-fighting operation would be revealed. Of course, what Garnett heard wasn't actually "dog-fighting," but "dog-spiting," a practice that he had perfected.

While there is no doubt that Kevin Garnett loves his dogs like his own child, it is also true that for years he has been America's premier dog-spiter. Whether it be convincing others that his dog really isn't that cute, or telling his dog that it's lazy and needs to get a job, his spiting ability is unmatched. Of course, this is all done at an extreme volume that some would label a shriek. He'd never consider fighting a dog, or having one dog fight another dog, but Garnett's faulty hearing resulted in a panic that he'd be found out.

One would think that it would be easy enough to stop insulting your dog, and for most people, it's not a problem. But Kevin Garnett has a compulsive need to tell his dog just how much smarter he is than it. Even if it's just mentioning that because he's a human he's more intelligent, Garnett possesses a pathological desire to degrade his dog. This dedication is what makes him such a great basketball player, but it also makes for some awkward situations. A day at the park isn't just a day at the park with Kevin Garnett, since he can't pass up the chance to beat his basset hound in a race.

When he finally understood that Vick had been fighting his dogs, rather than spiting them, Kevin Garnett felt a huge sense of relief. Then he told his dog that she was too short to ever make the NBA.
PAU GASOL

When Pau Gasol was honored on the cover of Spain's version of Rolling Stone magazine, many Americans quickly dubbed the cover “the best thing ever.” They were right. On what has since been named the “Spanish Elvis” picture, Pau is embodying the very essence of how a Spaniard would envision Elvis Presley (for further evidence, Google “pau gasol spanish rolling stone” or “best thing ever”). We Americans assumed that we had underrated Pau’s basketball prowess (we had) and that he was an enormous star in his home country (he is). What we didn’t know was why he was on the cover of Rolling Stone. After all, Michael Jordan has never been honored in a likewise manner in the United States.

Though it is true that Pau Gasol is an enormous star in Spain for his basketball skills, one thing that has yet to cross the ocean is what actually landed him the magazine cover: Spants. Spants, or “Spanish pants,” is both a nickname and a product that Pau Gasol has been developing since he first gained national recognition at age 16. It was only in the summer of 2007 that Pau’s Spants really took off.

Spanish men’s fashion has long been famous for its absurd amounts of visible skin. Shorts in Spain are shorter, and their shirt collars plunge further. Chest hair abounds. Being a slim, seven-footer, Pau Gasol wanted to change that. He was fine showing his chest hair (it is the mark of a distinguished after all), but he was tired of being mocked for his almost muscle-free legs. Something had to give.

One night, talking with his younger brother Marc, Pau blurted out, “We just need some Spanish pants.”

Marc replied, “what?”

Pau said, “I don’t know, Marc. We need some Spanish pants. Some spants.”

While it’s unclear why the Gasol’s speak English at home, the idea was clear to Pau. If you can make pants in Spain, you can call them Spanish. Therefore, they are Spanish pants. This, obviously, is true, but it is also fairly insane, as the origin of pants is hardly enough to change a culture. Or so you would think.

Wanting to honor his Spanish heritage by showcasing his body, Pau form-fitted a pair of hybrid denim/Lycra pants to accentuate what few muscles his legs did have. The form-fitting jeans took years to be accepted, and the entire time Pau Gasol continued to be ridiculed at home and abroad. Eventually, however, some fashion-forward fashionista adopted the style, and the rest is history. The “Spants” nickname lives on, but now, these “Spanish pants” are called skinny jeans, the fashion world’s favorite pant.
AL HORFORD

While Al Horford has only recently become a household name in the United States for playing basketball, in his native Dominican Republic he has been famous since he was young. The son of former NBA player Tito Horford and journalist Arelis Reynoso, Al sought to combine his parents’ passions, gaining celebrity at age 11 as the Dominican Republic’s first basketball blogger. Operating on the rudimentary Geocities interface, Horford created Alfred Grande (“Big Al”), a satirical weblog that has since been archived by Google.

Realizing the potential that the burgeoning Internet possessed, Horford set up his blog (then called a journal) by registering for a free Geocities account. Though he knew little about HTML, CSS or other Internet coding systems, Horford spent night after night perfecting the design of his site, a style that he calls “suburbanton.” At first, Horford was unsure of the path that he wanted to take with his newly found platform, and therefore his early posts were a hodgepodge of music, basketball, culture and humorous anecdotes. However, as he grew, he realized that his basketball background, coupled with his God-given writing skills, provided him the ability to address the happenings of the National Basketball Association in a manner befitting his absurd sense of humor.

Relaunched as a strictly basketball site, Alfred Grande became a modest success in the Dominican Republic’s online basketball community. Using a combination of imagined conversations, witty captions and other jokes, Horford made inroads with the blogging elite. While his site became esteemed amongst these tastemakers, he never made the mainstream impact that many assumed would follow. It was around this time that Horford became enamored with reggaeton music, basketball and the ongoing search for the elusive cryptid El Chupacabra.

Though he had moved on from his website, it was discovered by Dominican literary agents when Horford had turned 15. Turning the best posts from Alfred Grande into a book (*Alfred Grande’s Gran Libro de los Hechos de Baloncesto*), Horford became renowned as the writer laureate of the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately for the literary world, Horford had shirked the mantle of Next Great Dominican Writer in order to pursue his dreams of playing basketball.

*Alfred Grande’s Gran Libro de los Hechos de Baloncesto* has since become the greatest seller in the history of Dominican literature. Horford, of course, has emerged as one of the most promising young stars in the NBA. However, among friends he still confesses his desire to return to the simple life of blogging; a life filled with women, riches, and hours and hours of inactivity.
ANTAWN JAMISON

Among the most surprising names to find on the leader board at the end of the 2008-09 season was that of Antawn Jamison, who checked in at number nine on the minutes per game list. At 32, Jamison is certainly past his prime, and is entering the age where his production, and subsequently minutes, will drop. In fact, this was the third time that Jamison appeared in the top 10 in this category. At 24 and 29, that isn’t terribly shocking, but a 32-year-old man typically doesn’t play as often as those youngsters.

To understand how a fellow like Antawn Jamison could play so many minutes night in and night out at his age, all you’d have to do is look at his legs. Like all basketball players, Jamison’s legs are quite muscular; defined where a normal person’s are not, muscles in places mere mortals can only imagine. But a closer examination reveals something that truly is foreign to the common man: a supporting bone connecting his femur and tibia.

It’s not completely out of the ordinary for bones to grow in weird places following an injury. As we now know, Lex Luger’s forearms grew into hardened steel after surgeries to repair his injuries. Unicorns sprouted their horns after centuries of hunters shooting them in their thick foreheads. These are but two examples among thousands. Antawn Jamison’s supporting leg bone is a part of this phenomenon.

Though his 2007 knee injury did not require surgery, doctors noticed a small bony structure jutting out from the underside of his femur upon X-raying the knee. The examinations of his knee after his 2008 injury confirmed what doctors suspected: This appendage had grown in to a full-on bone connector, serving as stabilization for his troubled knees. While this might sound ideal for an oft-injured leg, it was not without its complications.

Since Jamison’s bone bridge began and ended on the backside of his leg, he has not been able to bend at the knee since late in the 2007-08 season. As such, he now looks like a hybrid Frankenstein monster/old man when walking. On the court, he has nullified the effects of his eliminated flexibility by increasing the amount of awkward spins he does by a factor of 10. Additionally, he has begun taking ill-advised three-pointers at an even more frightening pace.

The Wizards remain optimistic that Jamison’s bone support will wither in time, and that he will be able to someday bend at the knee. It’s their hope that once this happens, he’ll stop shooting so many threes. His wife hopes that he can walk like a normal person soon so that the couple’s children do not fear their father.
AL JEFFERSON

The amateur “foodie” community has exploded in recent years, and there is literally no bigger fan of the movement than Minnesota’s Al Jefferson. In fact, though many “foodies” are really just fat guys who like to eat a lot, a scientific study was performed on all “foodies” who checked the corresponding box on their 2007 tax return and the results surprisingly named Minnesota’s Al Jefferson as literally the biggest fan. The combination of his formidable height (6-foot-10) and not insignificant weight (265 lbs.) resulted in a surface area that far outstripped even the fattest of “foodies.”

When told of this somewhat condescending distinction, Minnesota’s Al Jefferson wasn’t surprised. He’s been the biggest a lot. By age 14, Jefferson weighed more than 500 pounds. Leading physicians feared that the resulting cardiac stress would cut short the life of the man who would one day be named the biggest “foodie” movement fan, literally. However, quarantine in an experimental weight-loss and training clinic in northern Iowa helped the youngster to drop an unprecedented 265 pounds in just four months.

Held to a strict 180 calorie per day diet, Jefferson was forced to find innovative ways to make vegetables taste good. Among his many tricks was the dousing of his green vegetables in sriracha chili sauce. (Sriracha, known to many as Rooster Sauce, is an almost unbearably hot sauce that causes those who eat it to want to stop eating due to the immense pain in and around their mouth.) Some days, Minnesota’s Al Jefferson would even eschew the vegetables and simply eat spoonfuls of sriracha, causing him to refuse to eat for days afterward in an attempt to rehabilitate the tissues in and around his mouth.

While the diet caused Minnesota’s Al Jefferson to shed weight like grey felines shed fur, his experimental strength-training program effected significant changes in Minnesota’s Al Jefferson’s body. While he had previously been a slow and slovenly lad, the high altitudes of Iowa allowed Minnesota’s Al Jefferson’s muscles to process oxygen at a far higher rate than that of a normal human. In a way, Minnesota’s Al Jefferson was becoming something of a mutant, but not in the gross way he was before.

Emerging from the clinic weighing 235 pounds, Minnesota’s Al Jefferson adopted a more normal diet, which caused a growth spurt of nearly two feet, leaving Minnesota’s Al Jefferson at his current 6-foot-10 height. Thankful for the change, Minnesota’s Al Jefferson took to the Internet to tell of his good fortune. It was on the Internet that Minnesota’s Al Jefferson found so many like-minded people in the “foodie” community. These people had struggled just as he had. On his way to becoming the literally biggest fan of the “foodie” movement, Minnesota’s Al Jefferson swore he’d never forget the little people who meant so much to him, especially because they weren’t actually little.
CARL LANDRY

Carl Landry was raised in a basketball-playing family. His younger brother, Marcus, is a forward for the New York Knicks sometimes. His sisters are college ballers. Even his sister-in-law plays college basketball. When the Landry’s get together to eat pulled pork sandwiches every third Saturday or every second month, they talk only about basketball (and pulled pork, of course). Basketball runs through the barbeque sauce-laden blood of the Landry family. However, basketball was not Carl Landry’s first love.

It was long maintained in Landry family lore that Carl’s first word was “soccer,” uttered when he was just 6 months old. They were surprised that he was able to talk so soon, since he insisted on wearing a mouthguard even at such a young age. While it might be normal for a child to speak within a half-year of being born, when that child refuses to take out their unnecessary protective mouthwear, it is a bit of a surprise.

Nonetheless, wanting to keep their child happy, the Landry’s let Carl play as much soccer as he wanted, wherever he wanted. As a shy child, Landry chose to keep his soccer playing to himself, even choosing to never watch another human play the game in hopes to keep himself a pure soccer player.

As he grew up, Landry became more and more skilled at his pseudo-soccer, scoring goal after goal over his brother and sisters. Soon, the Landry’s realized that Carl was by far the best soccer player in the family, which made sense since he was the only soccer player in the family.

It was years later, when he first enrolled in third grade, that the Landrys realized that Carl’s first word was really “sucker.” They found out their mistake one day when visiting Carl’s class for recess. Shocked to see their son chosen last for his favorite sport, the Landry’s soon noticed that unlike in real soccer, Carl did all the dribbling and shooting with his hands. Furthermore, they soon recognized that he hadn’t been playing soccer with his brother and sisters, but rather basketball, only using a soccer ball instead of a basketball. Whoops.
RASHARD LEWIS

He thought it was a dream, and really, he couldn’t be blamed for thinking that was the case. Though he was the top of the 2007 free agency class, no one was beating down Rashard Lewis’s door. No one, that is, except Orlando Magic general manager Otis Smith. And he wasn’t technically beating down his door. He was just using the phone like a normal person. Maybe an e-mail here and there, but definitely not destroying another man’s door. Otis Smith is civilized.

But it was strange to Rashard Lewis. There on his table sat a contract offer, six years long, for 118 million dollars. All this for a guy who nine years earlier had bawled his eyes out when he was not taken in the first round of the NBA draft. Plus there was the fact that he had been taking cold medicine for the past 72 hours. It was your standard summer cold; the kind you get when you spend an evening outside without a jacket, even though you should probably have one on. This was a particularly bad one.

Just days earlier, his best friend had ran the Seattle Marathon, easily a top 200 marathon in the marathoning world. Being the good friend that he considers himself, Lewis went to watch and cheer on his friend. But the next day, upon awaking, Lewis felt loopy. At the behest of his mother, Lewis started pumping Mucinex, Sudafed, and anything else he could get his hands on. His mom said, and she was right, that he needed to seem as normal as possible, if he wanted to “gets pizaid.” Her words.

Needless to say, the combination of various cold medications, a disorienting head cold, and the delirium surrounding his first big contract created a strange sensation in Rashard Lewis’s head. Like most of the NBA, its writers, and its fans, Rashard couldn’t believe that he was being offered a contract in excess of 100 million dollars. He was sure he was hallucinating some part of that enormous number. After all, he basically just scored and grew zany facial hair. And though both of those were valued commodities, he didn’t think they were that valued. Naturally, he signed this obviously imaginary contract with special dream ink, hoping it would become a reality.

Much to his surprise, the contract was real. He really had just made more than 100 million dollars for having a wacky goatee. Not coincidentally, the Orlando Magic camp reported that GM Otis Smith had been suffering from an even worse head cold.
KEVIN LOVE

Imagine you’re a totally tubular dude who loves catching gnarly waves on the pipe then kickin’ it with some fly honeys and chill bros while you grab some grub. Your whole life you’ve been raised to be the most righteous and cowabunga-est homeslice that ever sliced some whitecaps (these are all surfing terms). Every day you can do whatevses you want outside with your homeboys and crew and posse. Like play basketball. You can do that any time you want, because you live in California. For realsies.

Now, if you did live in Cali (as all Californians call it), pretty much the only other place you’d want to kick it is somewhere on the West Coast. That way you can keep it mad real on the flip tip. For instance, you could go to Oregon, home of a lot of people with beards. And guess what, you can still play basketball there most of the year because it’s still sunshiny day, yo. It’s no Cali, but it’s still ballin’ on the reg.

Given these circumstances, it’s probable that you’ll end up a pretty decent basketball player, especially because your pops is a former NBA player. Pretty sweet gig, bro. If you haven’t guessed yet, you’re Kevin Love, and you’ve got a rude awakening once you get to Minnesota.

And rude it was. Not necessarily the people as they were too concerned with fishing, hunting, and fish hunting to pay attention to the Timberwolves, but the weather shift. No longer could Kevin Love play basketball outside in a mesh tank top and hot pants. No longer could he surf day in and day out. No longer could he ghostride his Jeep on suburban streets. Now it was all thermal underwear, parkas, and no surfing. And ghostriding was dangerous on those icy streets. This was just September.

Though the adjustment was hard, Kevin Love was determined to make the most of his situation. He grew a chinstrap beard to keep his jaw warm. The several dickies he bought to wear under his new collection of v-neck sweaters served as extra protection from the cold. Naturally, he became an expert ice fisherman, catching his dinner from the overstocked pond at his local mansion almost once a month. He might not be a native Minnesotan, but he was sure going to make it his home. Ask him now and he’ll tell you straight up, “I don’t hate it here, ya hoser.”
DIRK NOWITZKI

As probably the best European player who has played in the NBA at the peak of their European powers and silly accents, the story of Dirk Nowitzki’s basketball training is fairly well-known. Dirk’s mother, Helga, was a handsome woman, and also a professional basketball player. She played against other famous NBA mothers such as Sorcery Johnson and Bertha Wennington. Dirk’s dad, Jorg-Werner, was an internationally acclaimed “handball” player, though few people believe that “handball” is an actual sport. Given these bona fides and his stereotypically German name, Dirk Nowitzki was destined for athletic superstardom one way or another.

Though he was initially drawn to tennis and “handball,” he eventually switched to basketball, due to his height. It was an easy decision for Dirk and his family and their Volkswagens, as Dirk had been always been a tall child, having been born at his full height of 7 feet. (As many know, German sports of the 1960s and 1970s were horribly tainted by the presence of performance-enhancing drugs that athletes were mandated to take by the government. Ergo, 7 foot tall babies. Leading scientists expect the same fate for the children of today’s athletes.) But whatever the cause, Dirk Nowitzki was enormous, and like any gawky child, he chose the sport that was most accepting of a freak of that nature.

It was after turning to basketball that Dirk met Holger Geschwinder, noted German basketball instructor and enemy of spell-check programs worldwide, who would serve as Nowitzki’s own personal basketball Henri Ducard. It is common knowledge that Geschwinder eschewed traditional basketball supplements such as weight training and agility drills, while choosing to focus on the important things like endless shooting and passing exercises, along with intense hair-growth training. But that is only three-fourths of the story. Like many things in the Motherland, the rest is shrouded in mystery.

Geschwinder and Nowitzki deny it to this day, but in circles traveled by basketball’s true truth-seekers it taken as gospel that the training Nowitzki endured with Geschwinder was both dangerous and cloaked in secrecy. There are tales of the duo traveling to Russia to learn the ancient art of nesting, which has proved advantageous when coming around screens. Most everyone accepts that David Copperfield himself tutored the pair in sleight of hand. And of course, most important, their trip to San Francisco in the early 1990s, where Dirk would study the hyphy trends that would eventually inform his herky-jerky offensive repertoire.

Though it is impossible to know for certain the extent of Nowitzki and Heschwinder’s travels, it must be taken at face value when they pay mouth service to learning the saxophone as Dirk’s only alternative training. There is more out there, and only through diligent digging can we uncover the terrible truth.
LAMAR ODOM

There was quite a fuss made with regards to Lamar Odom re-signing with the Los Angeles Lakers. Some called it a hullabaloo. Others, a conundrum. Still more called it a donnybrook, but they have little to no grasp of the English language. Regardless of the term, it was quite the story during the 2009 offseason. And this was before his quickie wedding to Khloe Kardashian, a name who will become more and more irrelevant each day after the release of this book.

So how did it come to be that Lamar Odom was involved in both the most important on-court story AND the most ludicrous off-court story of the same summer? With the help of his trust Magic 8-Ball of course.

Lamar Odom is a child of the 80s, even though he was born in 1979. Simple math will tell you that the majority of his childhood was spent in the 1980s, justifying his love of the decade. As such, he was raised in a world where the Magic 8-Ball was more than just a nostalgic artifact of a time when people actually bought rocks as pets. No, for Lamar Odom, the Magic 8-Ball was, and continues to be, a source of inspiration and an aid in decision-making. But for Lamar Odom, it was more than just an aid; it was the decision maker.

No matter what the problem, Lamar trusted the 8-Ball to help him choose the right path. Any issue could be turned in to the “yes/no” questions that the 8-Ball demanded. When the questions were small things, like, “should I make scrambled eggs?” Lamar felt confident. Bigger problems were more problematic. Yes, he had been raised to trust in the 8-Ball, but when you’ve left your life up to plastic, water, and blue dye, things get hairy.

“Should I re-sign with the Lakers?” Reply hazy, try again.

“Should I sign that Lakers contract?” Ask again later.

This continued for days. Lamar grew more and more frustrated with each non-committal response. But in a weird way, these responses strengthened his resolve. He knew this free agency period was an important one, and that he should not rush his decision. The apparent fact that the 8-Ball knew this too let Odom know that he should take its decision seriously.

“Should I sign with the Lakers?” Without a doubt.

“Should I marry Khloe Kardashian?” Most likely.
ZACH RANDOLPH

Most jokes are based in reality. Gandhi said that a long time ago, but it’s still true. And in the case of Kevin Malone from the American version of *The Office*, it’s almost frighteningly true.

During the sixth season of *The Office* (a televised serial documentary), Dunder-Mifflin branch manager Michael Scott spread disinformation about all of his employees. Scott told his coworkers that the portly Malone was actually controlled by another sentient being inside his body. We are lead to believe that the person we see is actually a fat exoskeleton that is being operated by a friendly alien being. While there may be some merit to gathering information about office life prior to an invasion, this story was quickly disproven when Malone’s body was dissected. However, one portly man has been confirmed to have an alien operating system: Zach Randolph.

The similarities are obvious. Both Randolph and Malone are gigantic men who are grossly overweight. They both have an affinity for pleasures of the flesh. The similarities even extend to Malone’s basketball prowess, which is shown in a first season episode of the show. Some have suggested that Malone’s “character” is based entirely on Randolph, but since *The Office* is quite clearly a documentary, this is untrue. Nonetheless, numerous x-rays, mental examinations, and body chemistry tests have proved without a doubt that some malicious being is controlling Randolph.

It all began back in high school, when Randolph was arrested for gun running. Convinced during a marathon interrogation session to devote his rapidly crumbling life to science, Randolph agreed to a risky procedure. He was never told exactly what would happen. Only that he’d be a new person when he woke up. That was partially true.

On the outside, he was still Zach Randolph. But now, his central nervous system had been replaced with an alien creature called Xanthu. Originally thought to be a benevolent alien, Xanthu quickly turned once it realized the earning potential that this hulking body represented, Xanthu ensured that “Zach Randolph” would continue to excel at basketball, therefore allowing the alien an opportunity to amass a small fortune. With this revenue stream, nearly indestructible exoskeleton, and an extraterrestrial communication device (hidden behind Randolph’s omnipresent headband), Xanthu has been slowly but surely crumbling the NBA from the inside out. The only hope to stop this almost foolproof plan is the undercover work of V.A.S.T. agents.
AMAR’E STOUDEMIRE

It hit him like a ton of bricks one day. What would happen, thought Amar’e Stoudemire, if someone made it so that soap worked on your hair? More likely than not, it would change the world. No one has ever accused Amar’e Stoudemire of being too humble.

In a way, though, he was kind of right. When you consider just how many people take showers, multiply that by seven days a week, the number of lives that would be touched by Stoudemire’s invention is truly staggering. Credit where it’s due, this was a big idea. But was it too big? Maybe.

You see, Amar’e knew the statistics. He knew that it didn’t take every single person on Earth for hair soap to work. It didn’t even take most. No, with nearly seven billion humans on earth, even if only 15% showered daily, he’d be a billionaire several times over. Furthermore, he knew that more than 300 million lived in the United States alone. If he could control that market with his revolutionary hair soap, he’d be set. The numbers didn’t lie.

Amar’e was convinced, and when he was convinced he made things happen. Fortunately for Stoudemire, he had an easy connection in to the world of hair care, teammate Steve Nash (see page 15). For years, Nash has sported the NBA’s premier haircut, and with that honor, the respect of beauty product manufacturers around the world. Stoudemire had his in, and his hair soap project was full steam ahead.

Because of an incident involving Shaquille O’Neal, Stoudemire was reticent to share his idea with his teammate, but in good faith, Nash set up a meeting with L’Oreal executives. With idea in hand, and the numbers calculated on Microsoft Excel 97, Stoudemire was to meet with Nash’s favorite hair care company.

Since Nash didn’t know Stoudemire’s plan, neither did L’Oreal. Nonetheless, most in the camp were excited about the prospects of breaking in to the lucrative athlete market. Stoudemire began his pitch, reciting his numbers from memory. For nearly four hours, Stoudemire preached the marketability of his product, and the sheer amount of money that could be made because people needed what he was selling. The L’Oreal team sat in rapt attention.

Then Stoudemire dropped the bomb. His product, he told L’Oreal, would be soap for your hair, to get it clean. Hair soap, said Amar’e, was the next big thing. The L’Oreal executives remained silent, but this time it was from shock. After all, Amar’e Stoudemire had just pitched the world’s largest beauty and cosmetics company what they called shampoo.
During the 1999-2000 season, Rasheed Wallace, then of the Portland Trailblazers, set the all-time NBA record for most technical fouls in a season with 38. It is quite the astounding number. When you consider that Wallace played 81 games that season, it averages out to .46 technical fouls per game, almost one every other game. Simply amazing, but also, confounding. How could one man be so angry? Why would his temper be so short? What was bothering Rasheed Wallace during that fateful season?

Like all humans, Rasheed Wallace is human. He has known love and heartbreak. He puts his golden pants on one leg at a time. He enjoys the simple pleasure of watching hour after hour of Keyboard Cat videos on YouTube. Simply put, he's a human, as previously stated. Human that he is, he is not infallible. Just like you, when he's frustrated, he gets angry. Unlike you, when he's angry, he gets technical fouls in the NBA. During the 99-00 season, he was angry. Furious, even. Super duper mad. Pretty enraged. Bananacakes. You get it.

But he's a human, not a psycho. There was a reason for his anger. A reason that he felt persecuted by every official in every game he ever played. We've all been there. Just on the verge of a major breakthrough, but endlessly thwarted to the point we just want it to end, for better or for worse. Maybe it was building a deck. Maybe it was barbequing ribs. Maybe it was writing a book of made-up facts using NBA players as characters. For Rasheed Wallace it was Beans On a Stick.

Wallace was convinced that he'd found culinary’s Holy Grail. Knowing the popularity of foods on sticks, Wallace figured that if he could find a way to combine that with the health benefits of legumes, he could make himself into a millionaire (he sometimes forgets that he is already a millionaire). Problems arose from the get-go.

One can imagine the difficulty in getting beans on a stick. It's hard enough to get beans on a fork, and that's basically four tiny sticks. A skewer of kidney beans was another beast. Try as he might, Wallace could not come up with a way to get the beans to stick. Small beans would break, while big beans would slide off. Thick skewers were out of the question. This enraged Wallace, leading to his short temper during the season.

He finally found a way in February of 2000, halfway through the technical-laden season. By dipping the beans in maple syrup, they'd have enough viscosity to stay put. When he debuted Beans On a Stick at the annual Keep Portland Weird Festival, he became a laughingstock. No one wanted to eat Beans On a Stick, because they were beans on a stick. To this day, referees regret suggesting the maple syrup adhesive.
DAVID WEST

The great country of America was built on the broad shoulders of families like the Wests. Self-starting, enterprising families. Families that could fill a need and fill it well. Families that would pass those lessons down throughout the generations. That’s how America was built. Also, the brutal murder of countless Native Americans, but that’s a discussion for another book (see *The Blowtorch’s Big Book of America Facts*). Nonetheless, self-sufficient families like New Jersey’s Wests and their duck-breeding conglomerate are the kind of people that make America the greatest country on Earth. Love it or leave it, jerks.

West Family Duck Farm is located just outside of Teaneck, New Jersey, like it has been for nearly 150 years and six generations. Founded by Harold West in 1842, West Family Duck Farm soon became the premier duck farm in all of post-colonial America. The Wests were well known both for their distribution and raising of the “Big Four” duck species (diving, sea, dabbling and mandarin), and also for their breeding of what would become the most famous breed of duck — the wisecracker. In fact, both Donald and Daffy Duck were based on wisecracker ducks raised at West Family Duck Farm.

After Harold came Bert, who was followed by Dwight, who was followed by Albert (“Bud”), who was followed by Thaddeus, who was followed by Amos. As the Wests kept handing down the reins to the farm, the farm became more and more notable. So notable, in fact, that West Family Duck Farm won the inaugural Water Fowl Awards for Best Breeding, Best Farming and, most importantly, Best Farm in 1972. However, by 1980, West Family Duck Farm was in trouble. Though Amos had fathered 12 children with his wife Harriet, he had not yet produced a son. Much like Henry VIII, Amos feared that he would lose control of the farm, and would be therefore looked upon with shame. All that changed on August 29, with the birth of David.

But David wasn’t interested in ducks. He liked girls and basketball, but mostly basketball. And as he grew taller and taller, Amos knew that the likelihood of David becoming a duck farmer grew smaller and smaller. David’s enrollment at Hargrave Military Academy was bittersweet for Amos. Yes, his son would be following in the footsteps of such legends as Larry Brown, Torry Holt and Korleone Young, but he’d also not be following in the footsteps of his forefathers and foregrandfathers. To this day, to honor his family and their duck-farming legacy, David West emits a loud quack after every point he scores. And yes, the Wests kept their farm. Women can run farms nowadays.
ANDRIS BIEDRINS

Born in Latvia (formerly of the USSR), Andris Biedrins has matured into one of the most promising centers in the National Basketball Association. The son of a farmer father and propagandist mother, Andris was on the path to superstardom from a young age. Tabbed early as the successor to Latvian pop star Ellie, Biedrins was enrolled at the locally famous Balvi School for Dance and Voice and Other Performing Arts. While at BSDVPA, Andris was trained in a myriad of different musical styles, among them ragtime, easy-listening, J-pop and, of course, the ancient Latvian art of harmonized throat-squelching.

As he grew, Biedrins became disenchanted with the machinations that had so clearly benefited him; as such, he was expelled from the school and forced into exile in parts unknown of the Limbazi district. During this time, Biedrins developed his own set of strict moral and spiritual guidelines that he follows to this day. Through his adherence to these guidelines, Biedrins ingrained in himself a humble and reverential devotion to daily prayer. Being of Latvian descent, Biedrins’ prayers naturally turned toward a way to restore glory to his family name.

One evening, while in his regimented prayer trance, Biedrins slipped into a state he has since called “transcendent meditation.” As such, he lost control of all bodily functions and soiled himself. However, another, less disgusting change happened to Andris that night. While his body recovered from its momentary loss of normal human function, it grew at an impressive rate. By the time he regained consciousness, Biedrins had reached a height of 6 feet 11 inches, far taller than the typical Latvian man (5 feet 6 inches). Realizing this growth was a direct result of his routine, Andris devoted himself to a game he had never played, but had heard tell of during a singing tour of southern Spain: basketball.

Clueless about the traditions and training required to become successful in this foreign game, Biedrins trekked nearly 200,000 miles, shoeless, to the campus of the Arvydas Sabonis Basketball Academy. Though he was filthy and in tattered clothes, the school accepted him, as they recognized his face from promotional posters that had been plastered in nearby towns. Though initially adamant about never performing again, Andris agreed to the school’s request; in return for tuition and board, Andris would serve as the academy’s entertainment.

Thankful to be pursuing his new dream, Andris threw himself wholeheartedly into his studies and performances, even coming to appreciate the vocal training he had received at such a young age. It was at the Sabonis school that Biedrins would begin to ply the trade that would someday make him a multimillionaire. Learning rebounding, passing and the making of collage flyers, Biedrins became a minor legend in the school’s great tradition. More important to Andris, however, was the respect and honor that he restored to the Biedrins family name. (Ironically, “Biedrins” is Latvian for “the humiliated.”)
ANDREW BOGUT

Hailing from Melbourne, Australia, Andrew Bogut is a multitalented center whose tendency to get in to, and out of, sticky situations has been a huge benefit in his basketball life. Many times, Bogut has maneuvered himself into not-so-great circumstances, only to find that his cunning and guile allowed him a safe exit. For instance, the Accidental Capers Caper of Cape York Peninsula.

The story seems nearly impossible. A teenage boy at the helm of an international spice cartel is unthinkable. But that is exactly how Australian officials saw the case. First the basics: Cape York Peninsula is a shipping port in lower Australia. This provides a safe and easy passage for various imports and exports. Chief among these is the spice trade, an operation that has existed for nearly 1,000 years.

In the early 1990s, Cape York police began to notice an unsettling amount of ships leaving their ports, nearly double their expected output. It was also around this time that caper meadows throughout Australia began to mysteriously catch fire. Now, brush fires are not uncommon for that region of Australia, but it was quite suspicious that these meadows had been picked clean of their cash crop, the delicious caper.

Using rudimentary tracking software, the police soon found that the increase in ships leaving the ports directly correlated with Andrew Bogut’s travels to the United States, Canada and some Pacific Rim countries for various basketball camps. Initially discarding this information due to its ludicrous nature, the police began to delve deeper into the ownership records of the ships. What they found was certainly a shock; each and every ship had, at one point, been under the possession of Bo-Gust Shipping. Now the evidence was too compelling to ignore. A manhunt ensued.

Andrew went into hiding, unsure of how to disprove this seemingly iron-clad evidence. Traveling by covered rickshaw from shanty town to shanty town, Bogut finally was apprehended in the small town of Adelaide. Faced with multiple documents bearing the signature of an “A. Bogut” and unable to pay a lawyer, Bogut’s situation was desperate.

But Bogut pressed on, carefully examining the contracts. He noticed something quite unusual: the font. Careful investigation proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the font used for these contracts (Calibri) had not yet been made commercially available in Australia. Exonerated through attention to detail and a little bit of luck, Bogut swore to use this experience to make something of himself. To this day, Bogut credits his meticulous practice habits to the lessons he learned by saving his own life through font examination. It should also be noted that Bogut refuses to eat capers to this day.
ANDREW BYNUM

It is almost a rite of passage for an NBA star to be honored by their high school. The events are breathlessly covered by the local news, then broadcast nationwide by ESPN. You see the athlete return home, celebrated by kids he didn’t go to school with, and congratulated by teachers whose classes he didn’t care about. It’s a heart-warming ordeal. Typically, the player is honored with a retired jersey, plaque, or some other kind of memorabilia that will hopefully entice the player to donate money to their alma mater. The charge for this honor usually falls to the superintendent of the school district to institute an Othella Harrington Day or some other similar celebration.

But what if the player doesn’t have that great of a connection to the high school? Or what if the superintendent retires after the player leaves, and the next superintendent couldn’t care less about how Michael Doleac averaged 12 points a game his senior year? In extenuating circumstances such as these, drastic measures must be undertaken.

Andrew Bynum was a dominant high school player for St. Joseph’s High School in Metuchen, New Jersey. Of course, this came after he had been a dominant high school player for the Solebury School in New Hope, Pennsylvania. But not that dominant. Neither high school that Bynum attended won a state championship, and he played no more than 40 games at either school. So how would this prodigiously talented young man be honored by a high school? The onus fell on Bynum himself to determine.

And when Andrew Bynum’s back is up against the wall, he does what he does best: look out for Andrew Bynum. Realizing that if he didn’t do anything for himself, nothing would be done, Bynum obtained a 49 square foot rectangle of California redwood to begin his project. Freed from the struggles of NBA competition due to knee injury, Bynum began chiseling out spaces in the redwood hunk to create an enormous trophy case. Then, when he forgot the name of his high school coach in Pennsylvania, Bynum donated the trophy case to St. Joseph’s High.

St. Joseph’s was surprised, to say the least. Yes, Bynum had played 32 games there, and had performed well enough to be a McDonald’s All-American, but that was the only trophy he had earned. So now, in the St. Joseph’s High School cafeteria sits the Andrew Bynum Memorial Andrew Bynum Shrine Provided by Andrew Bynum. It houses his All-American trophy and over 10,000 signed pictures that Bynum continuously sends to the school. The school administration agrees that this is a wholly appropriate commemoration for their most famous alumnus who did not sing “Livin’ On a Prayer.”
MARCUS CAMBY

On June 26, 1996, Marcus Camby met Jermaine O’Neal (see page 99) at the NBA Draft in East Rutherford, New Jersey. At the time, it was an innocuous meeting between two young men. However, after many millennia have passed, scholars will look back upon that day as the most important in sub-aquatic history. They will realize that these two seemingly similar men are truly diametrically opposed. They will know the truth.

Many decry the myth of Atlantis. Others, however, preach its truth and have gone so far as to devote their lives to the preservation of the lost island. The League of Underwater Nations and its members (including director O’Neal) are committed to debunking each and every piece of alleged evidence that appears online and in mainstream media. Their dedication is so exacting that it is often impossible to perceive their manipulations. In fact, a minion of the League could have written this very entry, and you would be none the wiser (this is not the case).

Since his time as center for the University of Massachusetts in 1995, Marcus Camby has used his national prominence as a soapbox, giving himself wholeheartedly to exposing the truth behind Atlantis and the League of Underwater Nations. Though not particularly concerned with the lesser submerged secrets, Camby has logged many hours at his trusty Dell Inspiron desktop computer. Setting up website after website after Internet web log after message posting, Camby has sought to shine light upon the horrible tragedies suffered by the Atlantisans.

Convinced during a freshman year Greek philosophy class that Atlantis was real, Camby spent the summer prior to his rookie season exploring Greece and its surrounding lands. Much to his consternation, Camby uncovered documentation proving that not only did Atlantis actually exist, but that it was still inhabited by a bloodthirsty group of omniscient beings. He also soon discovered how important this secret was, for it was soon thereafter that the League approached him.

O’Neal’s overtures at the Draft only served to embolden Camby. While at first he was content knowing the truth, after being confronted about this knowledge, Camby knew its true value. If Camby didn’t do everything he could to illuminate this horrible truth, he knew that the blood of many would be on his hands. As such, he began his life’s work of telling anyone he could about the true horrors of Atlantis. But just as Camby has made a career blocking shots around the basket, the League of Underwater Nations has made a killing blocking this kind of sensitive information.
TYSON CHANDLER

Who doesn't love a good buffet? Fitness freaks, germaphobes and Tyson Chandler, that's who. Also, lots of other groups of people, obviously.

It's pretty easy to understand why an avid fitness practitioner would dislike buffet-style meals. The overabundance of food makes overeating too easy, not to mention the meticulousness of buffet preparations leaves a lot to be desired. Similarly, germaphobes hate buffets because of their crippling fear of other people handling, touching or looking at their food and dishes. In fact, most people will agree that buffets are just as creepy as germaphobes. It's just a handshake, guys. Chill out and squeeze out a little Purell, for Pete's sake. Nonetheless, these seem to be valid reasons for disliking buffets; Tyson Chandler's reason is a little more spurious.

As an abnormally tall 6-year-old (6'5"), Tyson Chandler and his family visited a restaurant called Golden Coins, located near his childhood home in Hanford, California. The Chandlers had eaten at "Coins," as the locals called it, many times. Famed for their "breakfast at dinnertime" menu, Tyson loved "Coins," because he loved breakfast, clearly the best meal of all. Being somewhat gigantic, Tyson became well-known for his eating ability. Oftentimes he would eat the equivalent of three full meals during one sitting. Strangely, he would never gain a pound. Most people assumed his intestines were parasite-addled, but the Chandlers were getting a lot of bang for their buck, so no complaints were raised.

All that changed on Tyson's 8th birthday. Choosing to go to "Coins" to feed his tapeworm (Joey) an entire loaf of French toast and some chocolate pudding, Tyson prepared by not eating for an entire week leading up to the trip. (Strangely, he never lost a pound.)

The plan was going along swimmingly. Alternating between two slices of heavily syruped French toast and a small bowl of chocolate pudding, then repeating, the Chandlers had been at Golden Coins for nearly two hours. Just after finishing his 16th serving of French toast, Tyson went to the buffet bar for his last bowl of pudding. And there, in the sweaty, lukewarm pudding was what appeared to be a booger.

To this day, Tyson will not eat chocolate pudding. His mother, Vernie, tried her best to convince him that it was just a cottage cheese curd. But Tyson remembers. He remembers the shape. He remembers the color. He remembers the ill feeling that washed over him upon first sight. And because he remembers, he avoids chocolate pudding. Wouldn't you?
EDDY CURRY

All Eddy Curry ever wanted was to be a father. Coming from a grown man, or even a college student, this isn’t shocking news. But coming from an 8-year-old, it’s a different story. That’s what Eddy Curry wanted, and eventually, that’s what Eddy Curry got.

It all started one fateful day in his third-grade earth science class. Eddy’s teacher, Mrs. Searl, introduced her students to the joy of horticulture. Each student was given their own watercress plant and charged with overseeing its growth and development. Starting the first week of September and continuing throughout the school year, this simple lesson was intended to teach the children about photosynthesis, but it also taught them something even more valuable: responsibility.

Eddy took to the experiment like someone who becomes very interested in an experiment would take to an experiment, meaning that he was very dedicated to his plant, which he named Eddy. As his plant grew and grew, Eddy realized that he’d never be the same once the plant finally died. There were lessons learned, but Eddy knew that, someday, he’d be without his plant friend.

When it finally happened, nearly two years later, Eddy was crushed. Losing the nearly 6 foot tall watercress left Eddy with a pear-shaped hole in his heart (a condition that would eventually lead to a contract dispute with the Chicago Bulls). He knew he’d never be able to replace the plant, but he still knew he needed something to nurture. Fortunately, the Tamagotchi craze was just getting ready to explode across the Pacific Ocean into America.

Curry was among the first in the United States to own a Tamagotchi. He named the yellow and orange egg Eddy and pledged that he wouldn’t let what happened to plant Eddy happen to electronic Eddy. Staying up day and night to ensure that his electronic egg baby never wanted for food, coddling or love, Eddy sacrificed much to provide an ideal life for his companion.

The Tamagotchi’s expected lifespan is typically somewhere in the range of four to six months, but Eddy’s lived to be 5 years old. It was the confluence of a massive growth spurt (from 4’11” to 6’10” in four months) and Eddy’s entering high school that finally spelled the end for Eddy the Tamagotchi. As Eddy became more and more involved with everything that being the future Mr. Basketball of Illinois entails, he began to neglect his virtual pet. For the first time in its life, Eddy let the little electronic poops pile up, causing his pet to cry for help.

Eddy couldn’t stand to see Eddy suffer, and knowing that he couldn’t devote the time necessary to care for him, Eddy (the human) made a very sophisticated choice for a high school sophomore. Taking Eddy (the Tamagotchi) to the nearby Chicago River, Eddy (the human) tossed Eddy (the Tamagotchi) in to the water, just as Eddy (the Tamagotchi) had always wanted. To this day, Eddy Curry can be seen every April 18, celebrating the life of his best friend.
DWIGHT HOWARD

Dwight Howard was born Kal-El on the alien planet Krypton to his parents, Jor-El and Lara. Unfortunately for the family, they soon become aware of Krypton's impending destruction. It was then that Jor-El began constructing a spacecraft that would carry Kal-El to Earth. As Krypton faced its last moments, Jor-El placed young Kal-El in his makeshift spacecraft and launched it towards Earth. As the rickety spacecraft narrowly escaped the exploding alien planet, Kal-El's parents perished.

Soon thereafter, thanks to the fancy hyperdrive that Jor-El had built, the spacecraft landed in Atlanta, Georgia, where it was found by Dwight and Sheryl Howard. Finding no evidence of any other survivors, the Howards adopted Kal-El, and renamed him Dwight Jr. As Dwight grew up, he and his adoptive parents quickly discovered that he had superhuman powers. The Howards taught young Dwight to use these powers to become a dominant basketball player, and also to be a pretty fun-loving guy. A stern man, Dwight Sr. always preached balance.

As a child, Dwight kept his powers secret in order to protect his family and friends, who could be endangered by jealous opponents, even going so far as joining his local chess club. In order to use his powers, Dwight was forced to assume a happy-go-lucky persona that would disguise his truly frightening athletic capabilities. This assumed personality at times hampered Dwight, as many doubted that he was committed enough to dominate the NBA. Nonetheless, the tiny shreds of ability that did peek out from behind his jokey personality were enough to convince the Orlando Magic to select him first overall in the 2004 NBA Draft.

Howard quickly rewarded the Magic for deducing that a monster lay beneath that incessantly smiling surface. During his first year, he was named to the All-Rookie team as a rookie. After a relatively quiet second year, Howard revealed a little more of his superhuman skills. During the 2006-07 season, his third in the league, Dwight exploded onto the national scene. Immediately declared the heir apparent to noted Superman fetishist Shaquille O'Neal (see page 100), Dwight became recognized as a franchise center.

At the 2008 Slam Dunk Contest, Howard finally unleashed all of his powers on an unsuspecting public. His combination of power, jumping ability and strange prowess at throwing a ball through a rim at almost no angle from nearly 2 feet away awed the audience. His donning of a Superman cape was a clever nod to the comic book character whose creators had appropriated much of his life story. To this day, Howard has yet to see a penny of the profits from this much beloved superhero whose origins were plagiarized from his own intergalactic journey many years ago.
ZYDRUNAS ILGAUSKAS

The Romani people are a misunderstood and oft-scorned race. Modern media has exacerbated tales of their craftiness, criminality, and general mischievousness. This is not to read as an intense defense of the Romani, but they’ve kind of gotten a raw deal. Most blame Borat.

If you’re thinking you’ve never heard of the Romani, you’re wrong. Because you have, only when you heard about them, they were called Gypsies. The name “Gypsy” was given to these people because it was thought that they originated in Egypt, and were exiled from their homeland because they had harbored the baby Jesus. Like everything else in this book, that is true. Except the part about them coming from Egypt, that’s a myth.

Anyways, Gypsies have been getting the short end of the metaphorical stick over in Eastern Europe for centuries. A nomadic people, the Gypsies are viewed as the kind of people who will do anything they can to separate you from your money. There is even a myth that if you encounter a Gypsy with a baby, they will throw the baby at you, and when you catch it, they’ll steal your wallet from your pocket. It’s an obvious fallacy, this baby-tossing nonsense. Or is it? Zydrunas Ilgauskas says it is not. And he should know better than most.

Born and raised in Lithuania (REPRESENT LITHDAWGS!), Ilgauskas has encountered his fair share of Gypsies. For reference, the standard European Union allotment of Gypsies per non-Gypsy (GPNG) is 70:1 (i.e. 70 Gypsy encounters per month, per person). Since his NBA debut in 1996, Ilgauskas has seen his GPNG rise to 1,600:1 when he travels back home. Due to his enormous wealth, Ilgauskas is bombarded with Gypsy happenings.

It turns out the baby-throwing trick is not a myth, as Ilgauskas has become the father of some 1,350 Gypsy children. Almost every visit to his home in Lithuania has seen him catch at least five babies, while being robbed of whatever valuables he happens to be carrying. Of course, not every Gypsy encounter results in a baby catch, but his gentle nature means that he will not let a baby hit the ground, a commendable trait. And though he loses money and gains kids on every trip to Lithuania, Ilgauskas keeps going back. He loves the company of his horde of Gypsy children, all of whom are trained to play instruments like the band Gogol Bordello. For this reason, Ilgauskas is a 12-time winner of Lithuania’s Gypsy Father of the Year Award, the country’s highest honor.
CHRIS KAMAN

All Chris Kaman ever wanted to be was a chair salesman. Ever since he was a kid, he’d dreamed of opening his own chair shop. A place where people could go to relax. A place where people could go to learn. A place where people could go to buy chairs. That’s all he ever wanted.

Kaman’s love affair with chairs began at an early age. At age 4, Chris retreated to his bedroom for 16 hours one Saturday, and upon his unveiling, his parents were amazed with the carefully organized collection of chairs that Chris had on display. Recliners and barstools and folding chairs — basically anything you could ever want to sit on. Naturally, his parents were curious about where and how he’d gotten so many chairs. Chris wouldn’t say. All he could offer was a plaintive, “I love chairs.”

By junior high, his obsession had grown deeper. As he’d grown taller (nearly 6 feet by age 11), Chris had experienced things as a child that most people had to wait until they were adults to experience. Chair things. Like sitting in the biggest chair in the house, or having their feet touch the ground even when they were sitting in a chair that had an extraordinarily deep surface. Some may have considered Kaman spoiled by his fortunate chair happenings, but Chris counted this as his true blessing.

High school brought woodworking and upholstery courses, not to mention Chris’ first attempt at making his own chair. Designed to fit his rapidly expanding frame, Kaman constructed what he assumed to be the world’s first chair made for basketball players. Being a high-schooler, he named it “Big Woody.” No one ever said Chris Kaman had any tact. Look at his hair, for instance.

As Chris’s love of chairs grew, so did he. And as he grew, he became better and better at basketball, even earning a scholarship to the Central Michigan University in the center of Michigan. Though numerous compatriots urged Kaman to leave childish things behind (for instance, his sickening collection of goose droppings) he couldn’t abandon his plans for chair-based success. Hoping to use his basketball career as a way to market his chair to fellow giants, Kaman handcrafted more than 500 Big Woodys during the summer before his rookie season.

That’s when he found out about interior decorators.

Growing up in Grand Rapids, Michigan hadn’t allowed Chris to experience this side of celebrity life. Once he saw the plethora of oversized chairs available to the typical NBA player and subsequently realized his inability to break into this lucrative market, Chris was devastated. He immediately destroyed the blueprints for Big Woody and shipped all the existing Big Woodys to a recently purchased storage unit in northern Iowa.

Though Chris considers himself blessed to be a part of the small subset of people who can afford any chair they want, he still refuses to shop with an interior decorator. And he still visits that warehouse in northern Iowa. And he still loves chairs.
BROOK LOPEZ

As children, we are prone to many flights of fancy. For instance, this very writer was convinced, for years, that he would some day play professional baseball. Furthermore, we often imitate what we admire most. An example would be this very writer, who, as a child, enjoyed playing American Gladiators with his cousin, with the added twist that they should pretend that their characters were cousins. Finally, in the constructs of our childish minds, we tend to believe things that simply are not true. Like say, this very writer, who at age 7 was sure that he was an alien of some sort. Normally this is no big deal. We grow out of these juvenile stages and become fully developed adults who run humor websites and right mostly unpublishable books filled with fake basketball facts. This is all covered in basic child psychology classes.

But sometimes, those children don’t grow up. You’ll see them at conventions, dressed as their favorite movie characters, on various Internet message boards, or at the Gathering of the Juggalos. Sometimes, you’ll even find them in the NBA. Though perhaps “them” is a misnomer, as it is really just a single player: the New Jersey Nets’ Brook Lopez.

Near the middle of his rookie year, a video of Lopez and former teammate Ryan Anderson was disseminated showing them dressed up for Halloween trick-or-treating. Anderson was dressed as Darth Vader. Lopez was dressed as Optimus Prime, from the fictional realm of the Transformers. However, Lopez wasn’t dressed up. He was dressed down.

As previously alluded to in the first and second paragraphs, Brook Lopez truly believes that he is Optimus Prime, and that his disguise is Brook Lopez. As a child, he was infatuated with the clearly ludicrous Transformers television show. While he grew up, Lopez’s mother, Deborah Ledford, thought nothing of it, considering it child’s play. But as he continued growing, and continued miming the transformation from human to vehicle, Deborah was worried. Brook was soon approaching 7 feet tall, which only proved to him that he was indeed not a human, but rather a robot with the ability to change forms.

It was too late to change him. He had already lived 18 years believing he was all that stood between peace and intergalactic war. And at 7 feet, Lopez was hard to argue with. Instead, his mother wisely convinced the gullible youngster that though she accepted him as a delegate from the planet Cybertron, most other people would not. As such, he needed to assume the identity of “Brook Lopez,” a seemingly dimwitted surfer dude from California. Only once a year, at Halloween, does Lopez shed his “cover” and assume his throne as leader of the Autobots.
DARKO MILICIC

Have your laughs, people of Earth. Darko Milicic is a bust. Great laughs to be had by all; just meet at the town square for your local jokes festival. Yes, the man has become a punch line, a website and a blemish. Some say his very presence in the NBA is a dark mark on Joe Dumars’ resume. Others say they could never trust Chad Ford again. Regardless of your allegiances, most agree that the Pistons’ selection of Darko with the number two pick in the 2003 NBA Draft, ahead of stalwarts Carmelo Anthony, Chris Bosh, Dwyane Wade and Zarko Cabarkapa, is the worst draft choice of anyone not named Kwame in the 2000s. Very funny.

But think back. He’d shown potential coming in to the draft. Those beautiful frosted tips giving way to a body that could shoot from the perimeter with ease and manhandle smaller opponents down low; a body that would revolutionize post play for decades to come. Ultimately, it was a body that betrayed him.

Weighing 275 pounds and standing 7 feet tall in shoes, Darko Milicic was born to play in the NBA. Except for that “in shoes” part. Had scouts taken the time to examine Darko without his trusted Nikes, they would have uncovered what would soon be Darko Milicic’s undoing.

Polydactyly, or hyperdactyly, or “weird extra fingers and toes,” isn’t a common ailment. No, it typically only occurs 1 in 500 live births, according to science. But one of those live births was our friend, Darko Milicic. And he didn’t have the more common extra toe. He had several extra — six extra, to be exact.

While it might seem unbelievable that a player could fit three extra toes in each shoe, consider that Milicic’s foot is truly a size 15, but he wears a size 18. Those extra three sizes allow him to cram his unmovable toes in to his shoes. And though you might expect a team to examine a prospect’s feet, remember that Milicic hails from Yugoslavia, a place known for its reticence to discuss feet issues of any matter.

Domestically, Darko’s extra six toes have made him a joke among basketball fanatics. The presence of that added bulk and immobility negated any advantage that his 7-foot frame may have allowed. As such, he became largely useless, all just because of some extra digits. That might seem bad enough, but in his homeland, Darko is a pariah. The distaste for feet runs so deep in Yugoslavian blood that Darko has had his citizenship revoked, leaving him to spend his off seasons roaming around Europe. With no home and no respect, Darko is a lost man. Thankfully, he has his extra toes (all named “Rick”) to keep him company.
Though he is a multimillionaire and the most famous Brad in existence, Brad Miller still has unrealized dreams. Well, to be technical about it, it’s a single dream that has gone unfulfilled in his 34 years: to be on *Survivor*.

It may sound silly, but Miller is obsessed with the show. He has never missed an episode, and he has hosted viewing parties for the premiere and final episodes of each season. He considers the first season the best, and his favorite contestant of all time is Greg from that first season.

Unfortunately for Brad, his money can’t buy him a spot on the long-running show. But you better believe that he’s tried. Offers to show creator and producer Mark Burnett have either gone unanswered or been rejected with a scornful voice mail message. Nonetheless, Miller is still determined to one day compete for the title of sole survivor.

During his first stint with the Bulls, Miller gained some acclaim for camping out to be amongst the first in line for *Survivor* auditions being held at a local bed retailer. Dressed from head to toe in camouflage hunting gear, Miller hoped to be the “redneck” character that has been so common during the show’s 21 seasons. And while this audition process did not garner Miller a callback interview, he remains optimistic that he will get his chance some day.

A student of the game, Miller feels that his careful study of the intricacies of each season will give him numerous advantages over other potential contestants. Furthermore, he believes that his athletic ability, outgoing personality and persuasive nature will make him one of the favorites, should he ever join the show.

However, Miller is all too familiar with the fate of former Denver Broncos quarterback Gary Hogeboom, once a Survivor contestant. After it was discovered that Hogeboom was a former athlete, he was seen as too successful to win a million dollars. After all, what’s a million dollars to someone who makes 10 times that in a year? Miller hopes that his relative anonymity among the general public will allow him to go undetected, and that his tribemates will just view him as the tall awkward guy.

Although his size will certainly make him a target for elimination, Miller is confident that he’ll be able to work some of the same magic that got him a spot on the United States men’s national basketball team. In fact, Miller has already prepared a parody song of Destiny’s Child’s smash hit “Survivor” for his next audition.
JOAKIM NOAH

Joakim Noah’s back story is pretty well-known. He was born to tennis superstar Yannick Noah and his then-wife Cecilia Rodhe, who won the Miss Sweden pageant in 1978. Raised in New York City by his internationally famous parents, Noah grew to be tall and possibly insane. After a moderately successful high school career, Noah attended the University of Florida, where he won two national championships and annoyed countless fans. In fact, by the time he had finished his three seasons with the Gators, virtually every college basketball fan that wasn’t either already a Gators fan or a female who liked his bonky hair despised him.

All in all, Joakim Noah’s fable has been widely disseminated and is reason enough for his inclusion in this book; however, his secret talent is even more impressive.

While most children of beauty queens and professional tennis players are content to tell their friends that they are the children of beauty queens and professional tennis players, Joakim Noah was different. Fascinated by infomercials for metal detectors, Noah became enthralled with the idea of exploration. He would go from park to park with his shiny new metal detector hoping to find random metal goods that people had lost. One day, by accident, Noah stumbled upon an ice pick that had been buried in the ground. Inscribed on that ice pick were the initials AH, who would turn out to be Noah’s greatest inspiration.

Surprised to find such a large object barely underneath the ground, Noah did what any 9-year-old kid would do: he threw the ice pick. Much to his surprise, after dislodging the ice pick from the soft ground it had become stuck in, oil began to rush forth from the hole. Unlike other oil repositories, this oil exploded from the hole in frighteningly copious amounts. Rushing home to get a bag to collect the oil, Joakim Noah told his dad something was up.

Most would chalk this discovery up to consequence, but not Joakim Noah. On the 29th day of every month, Noah would take his ice pick with him on a walk. Whenever he was free from sight, he’d throw the ice pick. And every time, he’d fill a grocery-store sack with oil, which he’d then take home to process for his lanterns. To this day, once a month, Noah goes prospecting for oil, and every time he strikes liquid gold. After all, he needs to keep the lantern burning in his Allan Houston shrine.
The legend of Atlantis is a famous one, which is why it is a legend. Ancient Greeks (including Vasileios Spanoulis’ great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, Bill) told stories of the island that sank into the ocean after a failed invasion of Athens. Since then, numerous explorers, treasure seekers and Google employees have devoted countless man hours to discovering the true location of this supposed utopia. The more and more people search, the greater the legend grows. And for some people, that’s the problem.

The League of Underwater Nations is committed to protecting the sites of this and other sunken paradises. Much like Lost’s “Others,” the League, as they like to be called, use any means necessary to keep these locations hidden, while also refuting any alleged advancements that voyagers claim to have made. At the head of the League is its director: Jermaine O’Neal.

O’Neal was fascinated by Greek mythology as a child. After jumping straight from high school to the NBA, Jermaine lived in a state of arrested development. Hoping to shield himself from the influences from his troubled Trail Blazer teammates, O’Neal delved deeply into what he had grown accustomed to as an adolescent. On a diet of fast food, Gatorade and sweets, O’Neal became enamored with this fantasy world that at one time wasn’t so much of a fantasy. In particular, the people and disappearance of the lost island enthralled O’Neal.

As he researched more and more, O’Neal found his way to Internet message boards dedicated to the preservation of the legend. These likeminded souls were convinced, as was Jermaine, that the island really did exist. However, they, like Jermaine, believed that any human interference would both cheapen the legend and ruin its mystical powers. Furthermore, their interpretations of numerous texts convinced these message boarders that Atlantis was only the first of many submerged habitats. It was this line of thinking that lead to the formation of the aforementioned League of Underwater Nations.

By carefully editing various Internet postings, the League easily disproved countless “sightings.” But when Google Maps touted what they thought was Atlantis, Jermaine knew he needed to intercede. O’Neal began by making sizable donations to the League, at one point giving his entire 2006-07 salary to advancing the League’s causes. Flattered and clearly in debt to O’Neal, the League unanimously voted O’Neal to a directorship position, which he accepted with great fervor. Since his appointment in July 2008, nary a peep has been heard all across the Internet of Atlantis or any similar hidden treasures.
SHAQUILLE O'NEAL

For the past 17 years, Shaquille O'Neal has been a household name. Yes, the majority of those households have been confused about this most bizarre name, but it has nonetheless been a household name. And while those households (the same ones as before) know Shaquille O'Neal, they don't really know him.

During his time in the NBA, Shaquille O'Neal has been a polarizing figure. To some, he is the most charismatic figure in the game, the rightful heir to Michael Jordan. To others, he is a waste of talent. To people who hate basketball but love jokes, he's the King of Twitteronia. But to Shaquille O'Neal, he's just a cat lover.

Since he reached the NBA, Shaquille O'Neal has always made sure to surround himself with three things. First, a personal trainer, who is really just a friend who has big muscles and makes subpar rap beats. Second, a personal chef, who is responsible for figuring out if it's possible to fry any food that O'Neal wants. And last, but certainly not least, a cat named Eric.

Shaq got his first Eric upon being picked first overall in the 1992 NBA Draft. A white, female Persian, Shaq named the cat (a gift from his mother) after Eric Estrada, star of O'Neal's favorite television show, CHiPs. Eric became O'Neal's travel companion, a security blanket of sorts. While other members of the Orlando Magic would bring their wives or girlfriends along on road trips, Shaq shelled out $15,000 for a luxury cage that could easily be carried on a plane. Packing up his cage with the finest gourmet cat food from a local deli, Shaquille was sure to bring Eric to all the strange places that his team would play. O'Neal's attachment to Eric frightened Magic management, but they kept quiet for a time.

After winning the Rookie of the Year Award, O'Neal attributed his success to Eric, and subsequently began to add a new cat for each season he played. Being a superstitious man, each cat was named Eric and each cat would travel with the team to its games. By the end of the 1995-96 season, O'Neal had four Erics traveling in a “cat apartment” designed by Gianni Versace. The Magic brass had had enough, and instituted a rule stating that the team's travel services were only to be used by humans. O'Neal was furious, and it was this rift that led to his leaving Orlando for the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Lakers were understanding of O'Neal's desires, having accommodated Elden Campbell and his 39 ferrets. This sense of freedom and acceptance spurred O'Neal to play the best basketball of his career, eventually winning three straight championships from 1999 through 2002. Throughout his career, in all his various stops, he has been sure to include a travel clause for his brood of Erics, now numbering 14 after the unfortunate demise of the first three in the summer of 2004.
GREG ODEN

In the olden days of the National Basketball Association, it was not uncommon for a player to supplement his income with a second job. Stories abound of players like Dave Cowens, who took a leave of absence from the league to drive a taxicab. Another popular legend passed down is that of Oscar Robertson, who worked mornings as a garbage man throughout the season. Of course, Maurice Lucas’ lucrative side career as a time-travel test subject is well documented by the Portland Trail Blazers (and is in fact the reason that they had to hire a doctor — Jack Ramsay — as Lucas’s coach). But since the NBA has become a wealthy league with countless endorsers, the side-job era has essentially ended. But for one man, a throwback in more ways than one, that era is still alive and well.

As basically anyone with an outlet has joked, Greg Oden does not look as if he belongs to this generation. His deeply furrowed brow, wrinkly head and numerous concentric inner rings lead many to believe that Oden is, in fact, an old man, rather than the sprightly youngster that he really is. However, his preference for simpler times does indeed lend credence to this clichéd attempt at humor. But Oden’s love of Metamucil and constant viewing of Matlock are simply superficial quirks, while his second career as a home stager is the real evidence that he belongs to a bygone era.

Like many college males, Greg Oden’s then-girlfriend made him watch TLC ad nauseum. After hours and hours of watching Trading Spaces, however, Oden’s girlfriend took to watching new reruns on A&E. That’s when Greg Oden fell in love. No, not with his girlfriend, with Sell This House, a home staging show broadcast on the network.

Whether it was the gentle nature of host Roger Hazard or the transformational nature of the project at hand, Oden was instantly smitten. Repeat after repeat viewing of the show eventually lead Greg to try his hand at using the techniques that had become so deeply ingrained in his mind. After successfully lofting his dorm room beds, Greg knew he had what it took to succeed in the ruthless home staging industry.

To this day, Greg Oden is the only NBA player to hold a second job. Many speculate that this is because other players are far more marketable than an enormous, brittle man-baby. Others incorrectly reason that Oden is in fact more than 40 years old. In actuality, Greg Oden is just like so many of his fans. He fell in love with something in college and it stuck.
EMEKA OKAFOR

He always wanted a desk job, something that he could count on. Every day he’d go to his job, sit in his cubicle, and wait to leave. For those eight hours, he was just like anybody else...bored. Yeah, maybe someday he’d do something different, but for now, he’d love the boredom. It would define him.

“What do you do?” they’d ask.

“Oh, not much. Sit at a desk all day,” he’d answer.

His time would be spent catching up with friends, or wasting time, or occasionally even working, believe it or not. That’s what Emeka Okafor wanted, but when you’re 6 feet 10 inches tall with world-class athleticism, you don’t end up for some corporation. You play sports.

If he couldn’t have the job, he could have parts of it. Whereas all but the most obsessed players despise film study, Okafor embraces it. That might be too mild. You could say he lives for it. If basketball was going to be his profession, then he was going to make it his job.

He convinced his brother, Eric Okafor, to let him tail him for just a day. Eric worked for a pharmaceutical research company, spending day after day staring at a computer screen. Eric’s gift was for numbers, science, and making it look like he was working. And he loved his brother. Couldn’t understand why he’d want to trade places, but he loved him, so he let him see how the other 99% spend their time.

It was a Tuesday, Eric’s busiest day. Mondays were dreadful, of course, but everybody knew that so they’d schedule their meetings for the next day as a sort of condolence for having to end the weekend. That day, he had a morning conference call, afternoon status update, and then a late afternoon team meeting. Emeka was going to get a real look at day jobs.

Just as he expected, the conference call was filled with people who would have rather been anywhere else in the world. The status update was totally pointless, something that could have been handled by email. He thought the team meeting was the best. Sure, it could have been a 20-minute happening were it not for the elderly woman who couldn’t stop talking about her problems. Emeka was thrilled.

Since that day, he’s added every bit of corporate America that he can. Film sessions last for hours. Each day, he charts what sort of progress he’s made on his projects (jump hooks, boxing out, etc.). He’s even forced his entire house staff to meet once a week so he can see what they need to do their jobs better. Unfortunately, his request to wear a tie on court has been denied. To Emeka Okafor, being called “workman-like” is a compliment.
MEHMET OKUR

Imagine, if you can, that you are a preternaturally gifted Turkish boy, one who by the age of 13 was already 6'6". If you can wrap your head around being taller than all but three other Turks that have ever lived while only in sixth grade, try this on for size: You’ve just seen the first basketball-themed episode of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, starring a young Will Smith. Now you know what it is like to be Mehmet Okur in 1992.

It had only been 12 years since the last coup d'état and nine since democracy had been restored across the country. In 1991, Mesut Yılmaz became head of Turkish Parliament, bringing with him both a focus on economic expansion and a large dose of American culture. Smith had made his titular role famous at the turn of the decade, and as Turkey allowed more and more overseas entertainment, Smith became an instant star.

No Turk was more influenced by Smith’s gentle urban humor and harmless antics than Okur. Immediately transfixed by the show, Okur became an enormous fan, desperately seeking out any episodes that he could get his hands on. Through a pen-pal program, Okur was partnered with an American teenager named Wesley Miller, himself a devoted *Fresh Prince* fan. Since the series had been running for two seasons prior to its Turkish introduction, Okur felt that he had missed out on a great deal of back story and, of course, laughs. Thankfully, Miller was able to provide six VHS tapes that included copies of every episode that had aired in the United States.

It was on the last of those tapes, during the show’s second season, that Okur discovered basketball. Not sure what to do with his surprising height, Mehmet became maniacal about learning this game after seeing Will dominate the opposition while at Bel-Air Prep. Devoted to being as Smith-like as possible (he had been wearing the Fresh Prince’s trademark bicycling cap for nearly a year), Okur learned the intricacies of post play, but also made sure to master the perimeter game that Smith was so fond of. This seemingly innocuous discovery would change his fortunes forever.

Okur first came to the United States in 2002, when he became a member of the Pistons. It was there that he met another Smithophile, Chauncey Billups (see page 4). Together they formed the International Federation of Will Smith Fanatics, with Okur serving as president. Though he has moved on to the Utah Jazz and is quite busy with his basketball obligations, Okur still heads the Federation. He considers the work a small price to pay for the man he credits with changing his life.
The Detroit Pistons have taken a lot of heat for their horse logo. If you haven’t seen it, you’re lucky. Basically, it’s a teal seahorse that is spouting flames. In other words, it’s a totally awkward logo. Great job, Detroit.

To their credit, the Pistons knew they messed up, and during the 2001-02 season, they returned to their original blue, red, and white color scheme. To help them get back to their blue-collar roots, the uniforms were made completely of denim. Not coincidentally, this was the first season that Ben Wallace led the NBA in rebounding, and it was also his first of four Defensive Player of the Year awards. Wallace would play four more seasons with the denim-clad Pistons, winning Defensive Player of the Year in three of those campaigns. At that time, Wallace considered the denim a blessing.

After the 2005-06 season, at the height of his bargaining power, Ben Wallace was the most sought after free agent in that summer’s class. Free to choose his next employer, Wallace chose the Chicago Bulls and their standard red dazzle mesh uniforms. Wallace would soon regret this decision.

The added freedom of the mesh threw Wallace for a loop. Where as previously he had to carefully consider each and every move he made, lest the stiff denim restrict his motion, Wallace was now free to go this way and that. His numbers dropped across the board. With his increased range of motion, Wallace quickly unlearned all the technique his denim uniform required of him. He even became more fragile, lacking the protection of the thick fabric. Were it not ironic, you could say he was quite blue.

The Bulls and their fans soon turned on Wallace. Originally considered the final piece of their championship dreams, Wallace now represented all that was wrong with the Bulls. Overpaid and underproducing, Wallace was shipped to the Cleveland Cavaliers for Drew Gooden and Larry Hughes. Yes, Ben Wallace was so bad that a team would rather have Drew Gooden and Larry Hughes.

Of course, the Cavaliers also wore mesh. Wallace’s play continued to suffer, and he has yet to approximate his lofty status as the NBA’s premier defensive center. However, in the summer following the 2008-09 season Wallace was traded to the Phoenix Suns. Their advanced training staff realized Wallace’s dependence on denim, and quickly recommended that he be bought out. Executives agreed, and days later Wallace signed a free agent contract with the Detroit Pistons. Now, once again clothed in stiff, restrictive denim, Ben Wallace hopes to distress the NBA.
YAO MING

姚明非常高大。我們所說的 像種了似的高。有一次 一個摩天大樓稱為姚明一個特殊的摩天大樓電話 說 “嘿姚明 你高。”這是諷刺 因為人類通常是身高不超過摩天大樓。

姚明是最高的人都住在美國 同時也被命名為姚明。

堯謹嗯一旦觸及上限的Sistene禮拜堂。

姚明的腿 只要它們被認為是非常長。

姚明身 butter testing program (see page 7) 高。

堯謹嗯發明的高度。

姚明的腿 只要它們被認為是非常長。

有一次 一個摩天大樓稱為姚明一個特殊的摩天大樓電話 說 “嘿姚明。姚明是最高的人都住在美國 同。姚明是最高的人都住在美國 同。

姚明的腿 只要它們被認為是非常長。同時也被命名為姚 feet 同時也被命名為姚明 ankles. 同時也被命名為姚明 owns a tank.

姚明是最高的人都住在美國 burritos. 姚明是最高的人都住在美國 姚明是最高的人都住在美國 姚明身 姚明身 姚明身。

堯謹嗯發明的高度 堯謹嗯發明的高度 eggs 堯謹嗯發明的高度 堯謹嗯發明的高度 champions. 堯謹嗯發明的高度 姚明身 姚明身。

For real.
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